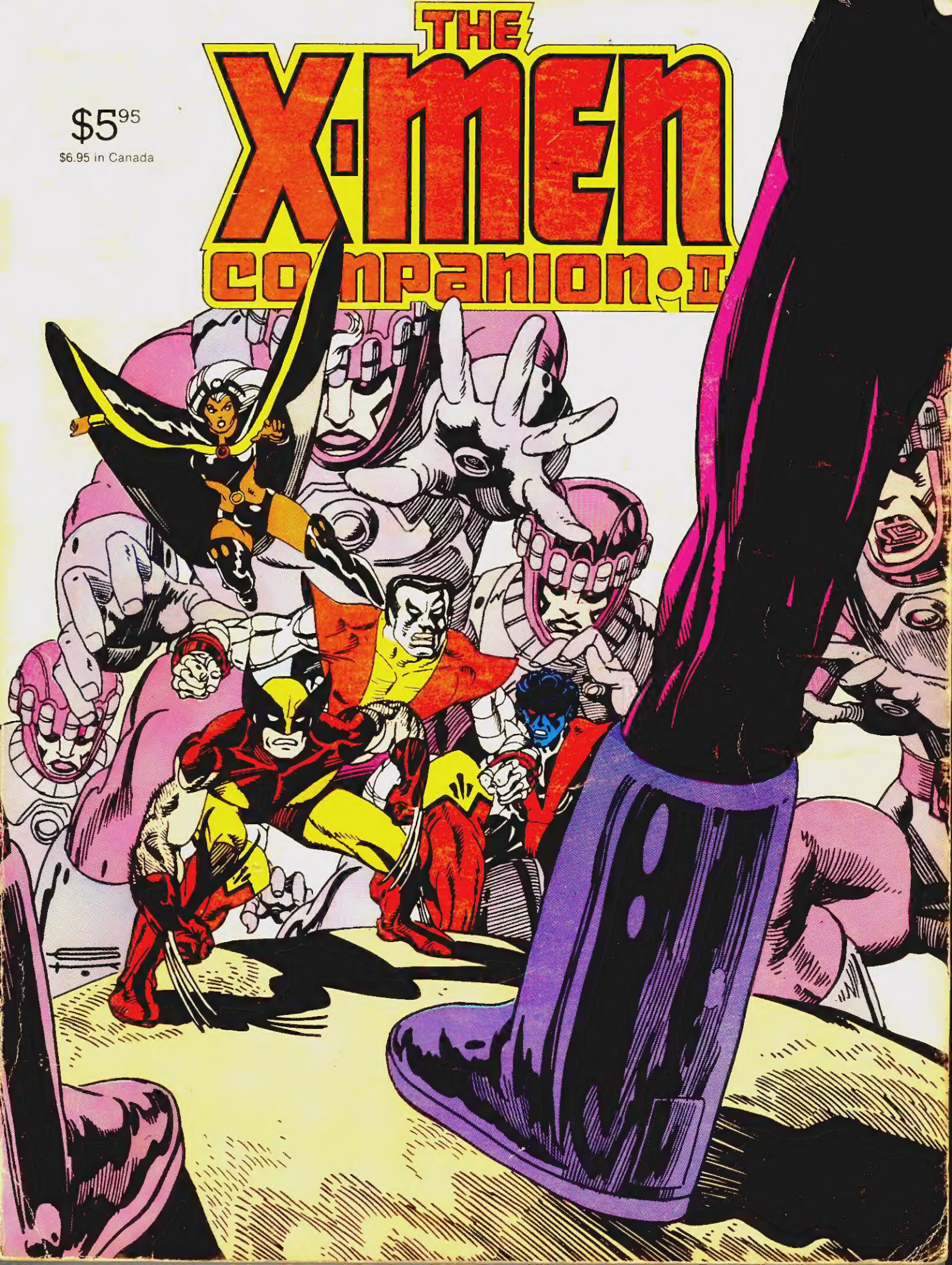


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THE X-men companion • II





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THE X-MEN companion II



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Inside Front Cover, Volume One: Cover art by John Byrne and Terry Austin for X-Men #137.

Inside Back Cover, Volume One: Jean and Scott share a peaceful moment in John Byrne's pencils for the original splash page of X-Men #137.

Inside Front Cover, Volume Two: Cover art by John Byrne and Terry Austin for X-Men #141.

Inside Back Cover, Volume Two: Original cover art by Frank Miller and Terry Austin for X-Men Annual #3.

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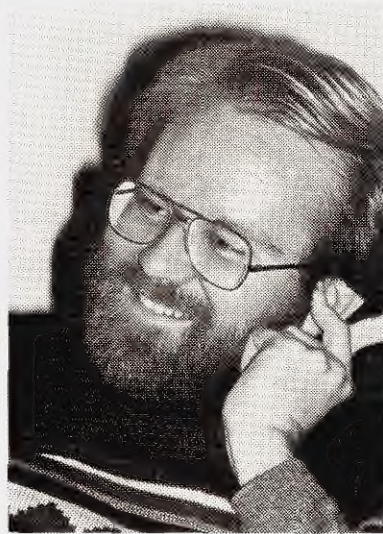
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"Pirate Kitty" meets a very different Nightcrawler in the enchanting "Kitty's Fairy Tale" [X-Men #153: Claremont-Cockrum-Rubinstein]

INTRODUCTION

A primary reason for the great popularity of *The X-Men* among comics enthusiasts has been, of course, the talents of the creative people associated with the series. But is there anything about the basic concepts of the series itself that makes it so especially appealing? Some have offered a simple answer: readers are attracted to large groups of superheroes with different powers and colorful costumes. This hardly explains why several such groups' books have sunk into oblivion, or why others, like *The Avengers* and *Justice League*, while popular, have never achieved *The X-Men's* cult status. *The Legion of Super-Heroes* and *The New Teen Titans* have reached this kind of popularity, but not to the same degree that *The X-Men* has. The mystery requires further investigation.

The X-Men, the Legion, and the Titans share another similarity: all are groups of young people. Originally the X-Men—apart from Professor Xavier, of course—were all teenagers, as are the members of the new team of mutants in *The X-Men's* forthcoming sister magazine. Today's group is both younger than the original (Sprite is 13½) and older (Storm is in her middle 20s; according to John Byrne, Wolverine is 60 in chronological age but half that in physical age), but the median age is about that of Nightcrawler's, 21. The youthfulness of the members of the three groups puts them closer to the age of most of their readership. But then again, Superboy, Nova, and the leads of *Dial 'H' for Hero* are all high school students, but yet have not built so intense a following.

The difference may be that the X-Men, Legion, and Titans are made up of young people who act with the freedom of adults. For the most part they do not live with their parents, like Superboy; we do not see them drudging through classes as he does, either. The Titans and Legion have no older person directing their activities; they merely each have a kindly adult financier who, in the case of the "new" Titans, died early in the series. The case of the X-Men is more complex. Xavier is indeed their teacher, supervisor, and father figure, but his presence and authority were far more important in the early years of the series. Increasingly since the middle 1960s the X-Men have gone on missions without his guidance, and today Xavier seems not the commander of the central team of X-Men but its ad-

visor, offering support and recommendations, but not attempting to rule with an iron hand. Cyclops and Storm are more clearly the leaders of the group today, and they are not mentors but team members who are first among equals. The X-Men in training in the new companion series will presumably be as firmly under Xavier's control as the original X-Men were in their early issues. Nevertheless, even back then the X-Men often had considerable freedom of action; Xavier was getting them to think for themselves.

On the other hand, the senior X-Men still take "instruction" in the use of their abilities in Xavier's "Danger Room." The fact that they are in this sense still "students" is also important. Neither they nor the Titans or Legionnaires have roles in the everyday world that readers might associate with adult authority figures. Clark Kent is a television news anchorman, Bruce Wayne a corporate head, Don Blake one of the foremost doctors alive, Matt Murdock a top lawyer, and even Peter Parker has apparently become one of the leading newspaper photographers in New York. All of them have "Made It" both as superheroes and as members of professions. However skilled in their "craft" they may have become, the X-Men, on the other hand, are shown to be capable of improving themselves still more. Like virtually everyone, the X-Men strive towards a fuller mastery of their "field." Unlike so many leading superheroes, they are not somewhat intimidating icons of perfection.

This point is underlined by the fact that each member of the X-Men, Titans, and Legion usually acts as a partner in a team. Since no one of them carries the full responsibility for winning each battle, none of them has developed the aura of utter invincibility that surrounds a Superman, Batman, Captain America, or Thor, all of whom are best known for their solo adventures. No X-Man is fated always to come out on top in a battle; instead, each one simply does his part as well as he can. Individual members can score successes, but they can also make mistakes. The group as a whole usually wins, but interestingly and more realistically, the new X-Men sometimes engage in conflicts that only end in a draw.

The X-Men, then, are characters who exist in between a childhood where people are wholly dominated



Kurt compares his philosophy of life with Scott's. [X-Men #138: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

by their elders, and a child's vision of adulthood (which is the basis of many superhero series) in which one is ultimately the complete master of his situation, a vision which, of course, never matches reality. From this standpoint the newest of the X-Men, Kitty Pryde, a.k.a. Sprite, is the one who best embodies the essence of the group. She is a girl who has only recently passed puberty and entered into her teens, and who has left home and parents for the first time in her young life. Her stated mission now is to learn how to master and utilize the mutant powers she has recently developed in order to become a full-fledged superhero. But the obvious subtext is that Kitty is a child—one with talents a gifted non-mutant might have, too: high intelligence and a dancer's agility—who is leaving childhood

behind to take on the freedom and responsibilities of an adult that her powers represent. Kitty represents the striving child in all of us, no matter whether we are younger than she or far older.

In leaving her parents and home behind to join the X-Men, Kitty entered a community of people more like herself than the people she knew back home. Here is what lies behind the argument that readers like superhero groups. The X-Men, Legion, and Titans each make up what the critic Northrup Frye has termed (appropriately for our purposes) a "comic society," a collection of happy, youthful, free individuals that exists in contrast with the rest of society. The X-Men is not simply a school for training mutant superheroes, nor is it merely a team of heroes who join together for no



Scott and Jean after finally admitting they were in love with each other. [X-Men #60: Thomas-Adams-Palmer]

other purpose than to fight evil, as the Avengers and Justice League often seem to be. The X-Men is a group of people with similar interests and talents, so to speak, who live together, socialize with one another, and very much enjoy each other's company. The party scenes that Roy Thomas and Chris Claremont have written into the book underline this point. If Xavier's mansion is a school, then it is also a dormitory filled with friends. It is a house shared as a commune by people who like being with one another. The X-Men make up an extended family group who stay together not because of blood ties but because of their decision to do so. This theme becomes explicit in Storm's references to Colossus as her "brother," or in Xavier's cautious move towards thinking of the X-Men as his surrogate children, and, of course, Kitty is clearly treated by the others as if she were their little sister. It makes sense that romances should evolve within this group of close friends, as they have between Scott and Jean (who was also the object of unrequited love from first Warren and later Wolverine, Scott's brother Alex (Havoc) and Lorna Dane (Polaris), Banshee and Moira MacTaggart, and now Kitty and Peter.

It is also important that the X-Men depart from the conventional superhero genre motif of the double identity. The model is obviously Clark Kent and Superman. Clark is supposed to be an ordinary person like the reader, but there is something false about this person because we know he is "really" Superman. Indeed, Kent's "human" failings like nervousness are both feigned and exaggerated. But it is difficult to see Superman as his "true self" either, because real people lack not only his powers but also his superhuman nobility and seeming inability to fail. Thus one man switches back and forth between personae, and does not seem wholly "real" in either. Moreover, while the Superman/Clark Kent concept assures people that beneath our ordinary, outward appearances we all have the potential for great success, it also implies that we can never achieve such success in our everyday roles in life, the only roles that are actually available to us in the real world.

The X-Men do not have two selves. They have secret identities to the extent that they wear everyday clothes when they are not engaged in their work as superheroes, and that for protection they do not advertise the fact that, say, Scott Summers and Cyclops are one and the same. But they do not go to the lengths that Superman and Spider-Man do to conceal their double identities from virtually everyone; certainly they do not assume different personalities to mask their superheroic identities as Superman does. The X-Men let their friends know who they are, and do not maintain identities in the "real" world as reporters or whatever. There is nothing schizoid about the X-Men; they have integrated their superhero selves and their private selves. The implication for the readers is that one does

Scott and Jean's last moments together before her death scene. [X-Men #137: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]



not have to conceal his true talents and feelings from the rest of the world in order to use them. One does not have to dress up in a disguise or speak a magic word to use his special abilities or to act the way one would most like; instead, *one should just simply do it*. To paraphrase a maxim of one of the comics world's most insightful philosophers, the X-Men *yam* what they *yam*. Again, note that superpowers can symbolize the talents that real people may possess, whether physical or intellectual, and the *superheroic identity represents the self-confidence to be able to use them*.

It is Stan Lee who is ultimately responsible for several major elements of *The X-Men's* appeal. He did not call his teenage heroes Spider-Boy and the X-Kids, as DC writers probably would have. He created his adolescent heroes as capable adults to a greater extent than most comics writers had done before. (Remember, most teenage superheroes had been only kid side-kicks, junior versions of adult heroes.) With the Fantastic Four, Lee and Jack Kirby created the first major group of superheroes who both integrated their public and private selves rather than hiding behind double identities, and who acted as a family group. Twenty years later, today's X-Men and Teen Titans have further built upon these ideas and hence have become the superhero teams most in keeping with contemporary tastes.

But we still have not pinpointed reasons for *The X-Men's* appeal that it shares with no other series. One

significant aspect of *The X-Men* that distinguishes it even from the *Legion* and the *Titans* is that its characters are mutants. They are not just otherwise ordinary humans who just happen to have superpowers, or even super-powered aliens who pretty much blend right into "ordinary" society. (How many of the Legionnaires actually look alien?) The X-Men are defined by the fact that they are *different* from the rest of humanity. They live apart from the rest of society in their mansion; their contacts with the rest of society seem limited; their powers serve as constant reminders that they are different, especially in the case of Cyclops's uncontrollable eyebeams. In some cases the X-Men are even outwardly different from ordinary humans: the Angel with his wings; the Beast with his fur, pointed ears and teeth, and apelike build; and most of all, Nightcrawler with his blue skin, fangs, three-fingered hands, two-toed feet, and tail. From one point of view, the Beast and Nightcrawler can be said to suffer from deformities. A number of the X-Men are foreigners who now find themselves living in the United States, an alien land. There is Nightcrawler from Germany, Colossus from the Soviet Union, and Storm, who may be American-born but who spent most of her life in Africa. Some are members of real-life minority groups: Storm, a black woman, and Sprite, a Jewish girl. Note the explicit parallel drawn between mutants and persecuted minorities in *X-Men* #150, wherein it is revealed that Magneto, as a child, was an



Scott reflects on Jean's meaning to him. [*X-Men* #101; Claremont-Cockrum-Chiaramonte]

MEANWHILE, NOT TO FORGET ABOUT HANK AND BOBBY...



Beast and Iceman find themselves in a predicament unusual for super heroes [X-Men #31: Thomas Roth Tartaglione]

inmate at Auschwitz, and that over the years, as far as he knows, his entire family has been destroyed. All of these distinctions reinforce the impression created by the X-Men's identity as mutants. The word "mutant" can symbolize for the reader any reason for feeling alienated from society, whether it be sex, race, creed, physical appearance, special talents that are misunderstood or provoke jealousy, or any more personal reason. The power of the mutant concept makes *The X-Men* unique.

The X-Men is far more self contained than most other Marvel series. It has its own organizing concept: basically, the X-Men are mutants who battle evil mutants, like Magneto, enemies who try to exploit mutants like Sauron, or foes who are out to imprison or destroy all mutants, like the Sentinels. Hence, while there are villains who cross over from other books, such as Dr. Doom (#145-147) and even Dracula (#159), the X-Men are primarily known for their conflicts with menaces who "belong" to themselves alone. This is quite a different situation from that of the Avengers, the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, and so on, who are each continually battling adversaries who have already turned up in the others' books. What was once, and to a degree still remains one of Marvel's strengths, the fact that most of its series are interconnected, has led nowadays to a growing homogenization: almost everything seems the same. Over the years *The X-Men* has also accumulated a large supporting cast, and has ranged all over the

world and into outer space. It is possible, therefore, to speak of an *X-Men* sub-cosmos within the larger Marvel Universe. All of this gives *The X-Men* more unity and more of a distinct personality than most other current Marvel series, and certainly more than any other current superhero series except *Daredevil*, which nowadays is evolving into a blend of superhero comics and film noir rather than remaining a "pure" superhero series like *X-Men*.

Many of today's leading superhero series suffer from their own longevity. After twenty years of stories, it is amazing the *Spider-Man* retains any vitality at all. Long-lived series best maintain their creative strength if after a certain point they undergo revisions that both return them to their roots and send them off in brand new directions. The most radical revisions were those of the Flash, Green Lantern, Hawkman, the Atom, and the Justice Society in the late 1950s and early 1960s. New characters took on the roles of these Golden Age characters; they were given new costumes, new supporting casts, new and more dramatic backgrounds with a basis in science fiction, and in the Atom's case, even new powers. The Justice Society was recast as the Justice League, with an almost wholly new membership. On becoming editor of *Batman* in the early 1960s, Julius Schwartz, who had transformed all of the aforementioned Golden Age series, revitalized an utterly moribund series by ridding it of all the junk it had accumulated over more than twenty years: Batwoman, Bathound, Bat-Mite, the ludicrous pseudo science fiction plots, and even most of the costumed villains for a while. Batman was once again basically a detective in a comparatively realistic world. After *Batman* once again grew stale in the aftermath of the "camp" wave of the later 1960s, the series

The Beast and Iceman try to enlist an unusual candidate for admission to the X-Men. [X-Men #27: Thomas-Roth-Ayers]



underwent another revision that brought it even closer to its conceptual basis. The grim atmosphere of the *Batman* stories of 1939 and 1940 returned, and Batman became the Batman once again, the obsessed hunter of murderous criminals. With each change, the series' writing and graphic style also took on more sophistication and a more contemporary feel.

This process continues today with, significantly, those series that create the most response among comics enthusiasts. *The New Teen Titans* is not a simple continuation of the old *Teen Titans* series. The new book's creators took no more from the old series than its name, its basic premise—a group of teenage superheroes acting on their own—and a few of its original members. And in the case of one of the latter, Wonder Girl, considerably transformed her personality. Everything else in *The New Teen Titans* is new, and so far full of vitality. It seems so contemporary that it is impossible to mistake the "new" *Titans* for a series

A calm romantic interlude before the storm: Scott and Jean atop a New Mexico mesa a week before her transformation into Dark Phoenix. [*X-Men* #132, Claremont-Byrne-Austin]



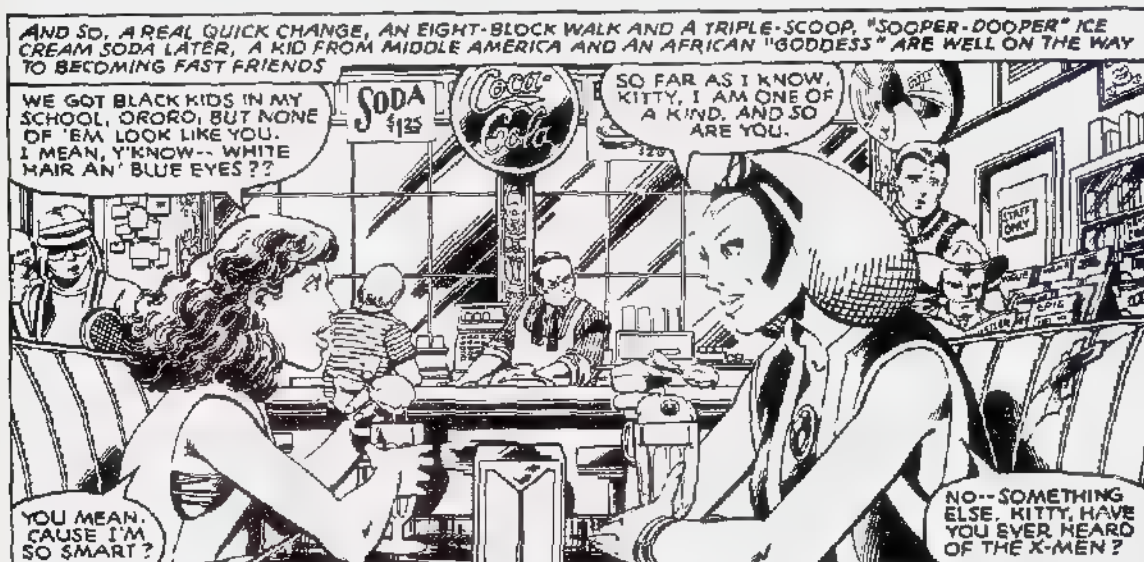
...AND WISHING THE BUTTERFLIES IN HER STOMACH WOULD TAKE A HIKE



Kitty Pryde first arrives at Xavier's mansion. [*X-Men* #136, Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

created before the 1980s. Frank Miller's *Daredevil* is a similar case. *Daredevil* had gone through a decade of mediocrity full of bad science fiction adventures, dull horror stories, imitation James Bond capers, and the usual umpteenth battles with ancient nemeses. Miller went back to the characterization and storylines of the earliest issues and then shifted them along a new direction into a chillingly realistic world of urban crime totally unlike anything else seen in Marvel books.

The *X-Men* too surely owes much of its success to the fact that it is the only major Marvel superhero series to undergo such a revitalizing revision in the middle 1970s. Len Wein and Dave Cockrum retained only Xavier and Cyclops from the original team and created several new members. These new characters, along with the personalities and storylines developed for them by Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and Cockrum, reflected the interests of comics readers of the second half of the 1970s as well as the stylistic trends in the medium at that time, rather than merely trying to duplicate *The X-Men* of a dozen years before. Indeed, by the end of the decade *The X-Men* could well be described as representing the "state of the art" in superhero comics. Yet although this new team of *X-Men* and their adventures bore little resemblance to those seen in the issues Stan Lee and Jack Kirby turned out, they were all still based in the powerful conceptual core that Lee and Kirby had devised: the youthful surrogate family.



Kitty and Ororo get to know each other [X-Men #129 Claremont-Byrne Austin]

ly of mutants, feared by humanity and yet fighting to save them from evil mutants and other foes. If a series merely recycles its old storylines over and over for years or even decades, it will surely die from a creative point of view, as so many Marvel and DC series unfortunately have demonstrated. If a series loses sight of its conceptual core, it will lose its sense of direction and, in this case too, lose its creative energy. The X-Men remains alive because it has avoided both these pitfalls.

In fact, *The X-Men Companion* is appearing at a significant moment for *The X-Men* itself. The "new"

series reached a peak with the climax of the Dark Phoenix storyline, and now, fully seven years after the "new" X-Men made its debut, the revitalization process may be occurring again. Yet another entirely new group of X-Men is being created for *The X-Men's* new sister magazine. This companion series will return even more closely to the conceptual basis of the earliest issues of the 1960s, for it too will present teenage mutants receiving their initial training in the use of their powers. Once again the focus will be on mutants deciding what kind of position they should take towards human society.

At a Christmas party, Storm realizes that the X-Men have become a surrogate family [X-Men #119 Claremont-Byrne-Austin]





Rocky Mountain High: The new, laid-back millionaire Angel welcomes the X-Men to his mountain home. *X-Men* #132. [Claremont-Byrne-Austin]



Nightcrawler gives Jean a going away present in the original ending of *X-Men* #138. [Reproduced from John Byrne's pencils]

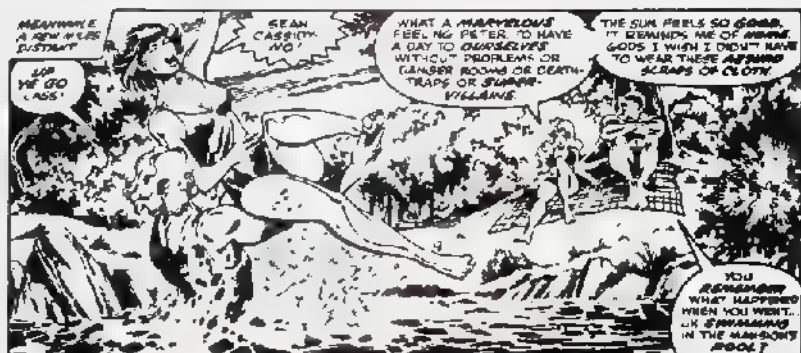
ty. Will they join the X-Men? Will they turn against humanity? Or will they strike out on their own, ignoring humanity, the X-Men, and the evil mutants? The introduction of Kitty Pryde during the Dark Phoenix serial foreshadowed this new phase in the history of *The X-Men*, and it is to be hoped that this new set of characters gives the entire "X-Men subcosmos" a new lease on life for another seven years.

Furthermore, whereas many series fall into a rut by running the same kind of stories all of the time, *The X-Men*, since its revival, has given its readers a great deal of variety. *The X-Men* moves from fights with costumed super-villains in New York City to battles with alien beings in another galaxy; from a real-life horror story involving possession (#125-128) to a "fairy tale" told by Kitty in which Nightcrawler looks like a Smurf and Wolverine like a cross between Yosemite Sam and the Tasmanian Devil (#153); from adventures involving all the X-Men, old and new, to tales centering on only one or two of them; from flashbacks to Xavier's past (#117, 160) to flashforwards into an alternate future (#141-2). At its best, *The X-Men* keeps its readers in a state in which they do not quite know what to expect next.

The "new" X-Men also represents a particular trend that arose in Marvel comics during the early and middle 1970s. In the early and middle 1960s, now termed "The Silver Age of Comics" by various comics aficionados (who never take strips into account in naming periods of comics history), Marvel was notable not only for the strong continuity linking its books, but also for the high quality of its "house style." Stan Lee's writing skills were at that peak, and when he left a book, readers knew that Roy Thomas would take over and maintain his high standards. As noted earlier, however, as the 1970s wore on, the stories written in imitation of the Lee classics of the 1960s grew steadily weaker. But Marvel remained exciting in the first half of the 1970s due to the influx of new writers, young men who had grown up as admirers of the 1960 Marvel books, who either brought new ideas and

perspectives to existing series (Steve Englehart's *Avengers*, *Captain America*, and *Doctor Strange*; Jim Starlin's *Captain Marvel* and *Warlock*) or either created new series or took series over in their early, formative stages (Steve Gerber's *Man-Thing* and *Howard the Duck*, Marv Wolfman's *Tomb of Dracula*, Don McGregor's *Killraven* and *Black Panther*, Doug Moench's *Master of Kung Fu*). This *nouvelle vague* in comics writing attempted to take the action adventure comic book story form perfected by Stan Lee in the 1960s and transform it into a means of personal expression as well as of entertainment. The best Marvel comics were no longer those that only tried to recreate those of the previous decade, but those that combined the craft learned from Lee and Thomas with a strong personal authorial vision. Chris Claremont's *X-Men*, which combines rousing superhero adventure with such thematic concerns as the division of the soul between good and evil or reason and savagery, and the relations between men and women, is the last product of Marvel's *nouvelle vague*. Miller's *Daredevil*, influenced by non superhero comics of the 1940s and 1950s, may be the first result of a new trend. Otherwise, what one reviewer has termed "The Plastic Age of Comics" reigns over much of Marvel and DC today.

Ultimately any analysis of the appeal of *The X-Men*



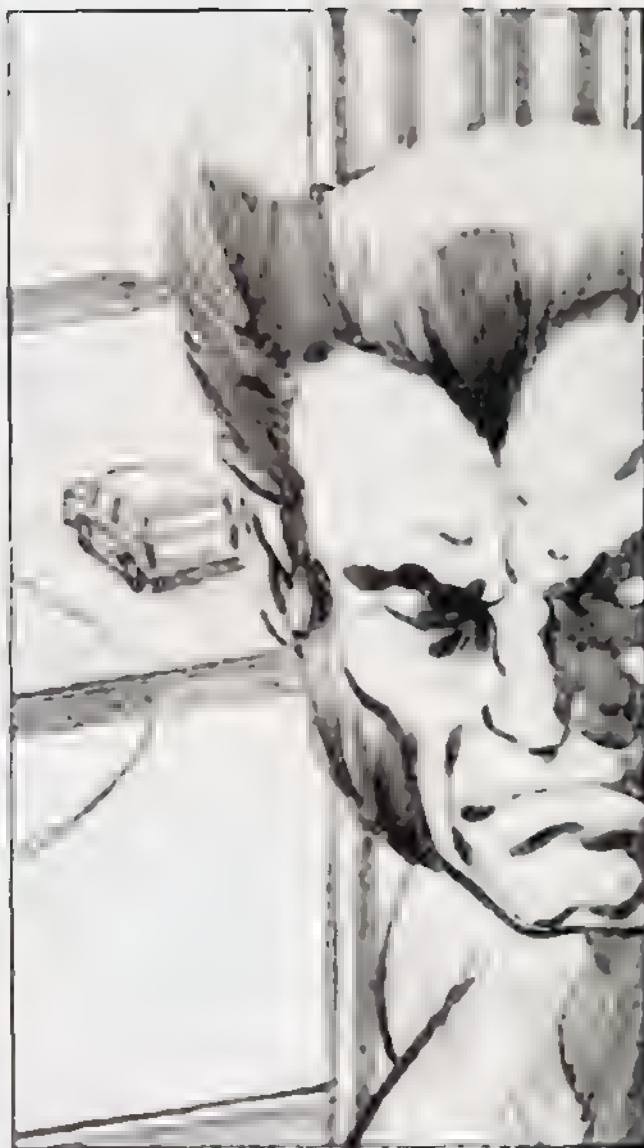
A day at the old swimming hole [X-Men #109: Claremont Byrne-Austin]

The X-Men at a time of sorrow [X-Men #101: Claremont-Cockrum-Chiaramonte]



must come down to characterization. If the reader does not care about the characters in a work of fiction, then their fate means nothing to him. If the characters have no depth, then they cannot teach the reader anything about himself. Therefore, without good characterization, a comics adventure story is no more than a slugfest devoid of meaning. *The X-Men* succeeds because of its skill in making its characters real. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby gave them their basic appeal, Roy Thomas worked hard to develop it, and Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and Dave Cockrum deepened it. Yes, the *X-Men* are super powered mutants, but the dichotomy essential to the series is that apart from their strange appearances and abilities, they are human beings very much like their readers.

Stan Lee first broke away from the traditional one-dimensionality of DC heroes with the *Fantastic Four*, but twenty years later, the *FF* look somewhat like stereotypes. In less talented hands Spider-Man's once-fresh personality traits often degenerate into cliché and shtick. The members of the "new" *X-Men* have developed personalities that are appealing due to their many



John Byrne's pencils)

sides. For example, Storm is at once both a regal, goddess-like figure and also a warm older surrogate sister to the group. Cyclops still broods morosely, but he has also become more open about his feelings, and more confident as a leader, and has even developed something of a sense of humor. Wolverine is a superb creation with his volcanic temper and lust for battle. His fits of rage are not played for comedy as the Thing's so often are, and he is neither a slow-witted, violent, but basically innocent monster like the Hulk nor a noble savage like Conan. He is more complicated than any of these three characters. Wolverine is attracted to violence, and yet he fears losing his rationality in abandoning himself to it. His potential for savagery somehow makes his wistful desires for love, friendship

and peace of mind all the more affecting by contrast. Even Xavier, once only the stern mentor, has evolved into an emotionally vulnerable surrogate father to the X-Men and lover to Liandra.

It is these many-sided personalities that brings the X-Men close to their readers. We may not know any human goddesses, potential psychotics, or teleporting human demons, but we can see personality traits of people we know and of ourselves in the X-Men. In the end the X-Men are not very different from the people around us. They are among the most realistically portrayed characters in today's mainstream comics, despite their superhuman powers, and definitely the most likable. What distinguishes the X-Men is that they are one band of superheroes one wishes he could know.



WILL EISNER'S SPIRIT

A BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF CLASSIC OLD & NEW COMICS, ESSAYS & INTERVIEWS FROM

Kitchen Sink Press
Princeton, Wisconsin



Interview with **CHRIS CLAREMONT**

(part two)

The "new" X Men series has seen its editors and artists come and go (and sometimes come back). The most constant creative influence on the series has therefore been Chris Claremont, who has scripted every "new" X-Men issue and annual beginning with the very first regular issue, 94, and plotted or co-plotted virtually all of them. Moreover, he has written stories in which one or more of the X-Men appear for Spider Woman, Marvel Team-Up, Bizarre Adventures, Iron Fist, the 1981 Avengers Annual, and Marvel Fanfare, and is now preparing to write a companion X Men series featuring a new team of young mutants.

Among Claremont's other series at Marvel have been Iron Fist (on which he first worked with John Burne), Ms. Marvel, Marvel Team Up, Power Man/Iron Fist, Star Lord, John Carter, Warlord of Mars, Doctor Strange, Man Thing, and War Is Hell, as well as Daughters of the Dragon tales for Deadly Hands of Kung Fu and Bizarre Adventures. Currently, he is writing Spider-Woman in addition to his work with the X Men, and is working on a forthcoming Conan story. Together with British artist John Bolton, Claremont has created Marauder the She Wolf, a swordswoman during the early days of the Roman Empire, whose first stories have appeared in Marvel's Epic Illustrated.

Claremont also works as a science fiction writer. His short story "Psimed" appeared in the April, 1973 issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.

Another of his stories, "The Last of the Dragons" will appear in 1982 in the second volume of Ace Books' anthology Elsewhere.

This is the second part of an interview that was conducted in February, 1981, the first part appeared in the previous volume. The entire interview was transcribed by Gary Groth and Kim Thompson, and was edited by Chris Claremont and myself.

—P S

SANDERSON: What books, whether in science fiction or mainstream, have influenced you, especially with regard to writing The X-Men?

CLAREMONT: Well, the first influences I had as a child say, in the last 20 years were Andre Norton and Robert Heinlein, and some English authors. Arthur Ransom, who did a series called "Swallows and Amazons." And James Blish.

SANDERSON: Why Norton and Heinlein?

CLAREMONT: Because they were cracking good adventure stories. Because they had published more than three good books. What I would do is pick one out and read it, and then if I liked it, I would go back and start picking out everything I could find by that author. And even in the late '50s and early '60s, Heinlein and Nor-



The shipwrecked Scott and Lee Forrester, his lady friend during his leave of absence following Jean's death. [X-Men #148, Claremont-Cockrum/Rubinstein]

ton had a bibliography of about two dozen books each, so it took a while to go through them—and they were producing at the rate of about one a year, even then, or Heinlein was about one every two years. But Norton was just boombaboombaboom, books were coming out faster than you could deal with them. So it was almost impossible to run out, or it took a long time to run out of works by that author.

SANDERSON: With Heinlein, were you reading at first just the so-called "juveniles," or were you mixing those up with the other works?

CLAREMONT: The books I remember most by Heinlein are, of the juveniles, *Citizen of the Galaxy* and *Have Space Suit, Will Travel*. Those were the two that implanted themselves most strongly in my mind. I read damn near everything else: *Star Beast*, *Space Cadet*, *Starman Jones*, *Double Star*, but then, that year, instead of a juvenile, I read *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, and then *Starship Troopers*, and then *Stranger* and *Farnham's Freehold*. So I just kept going, until *Time Enough for Love*, when I said, "Time enough to go away." The same with Norton. I got hooked on her, "Witchworld" series and then I expanded it to *Starboy 2250 A.D.* and *Space Patrol* and *The Defiant Agents*—I was really intrigued by the time travel aspect of it. And the Indians, her use of AmerIndians. And somewhere along the line I got hooked on John Brunner, again because he had this vast bibliography, that almost no other SF writers have equalled—except Asimov. I wasn't really that into Asimov. I discovered him very late, and mostly through *The Caves of Steel*.

SANDERSON: What did you like about these authors once you went beyond their pure adventure novels?

CLAREMONT: The characterization, the storytelling, the concepts. Brunner was more into structure. His earlier novels were very "straight" in the sense of traditional, but then as you get further into the '60s and got into *Jagged Orbit* and *Zanzibar*, he began playing with the form, the structure, making about as cinematic a novel as possible, and it's progressed since then. Heinlein drifted away from the absolute hardcore straight linear adventure novel into the broader, some might say less successful moral, philosophical, thematic aspects of *Stranger* and *Time Enough for Love* and *I Will Fear No Evil*. For me, about the last great Heinlein novel is *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, where, again, he created a new verbal structure in the speech style of the Loonies and wrote a novel about a revolution.

With Norton, it was the richness of the world she created in *Witchworld*, and the concepts, again, the idea of the planets, the characterization. For me, at that time, they were very exciting within the genre. And then I started expanding out to Arthur Clarke: for example, *A Fall of Moondust*, *Childhood's End*—those were seminal books for me and the more I read the more I wanted to read. When I was in college I was lucky enough to have a minimum New York State Regent's scholarship which I didn't need to pay for schooling, but which I used to pay for books. And I would invariably run about a five hundred dollar per year bookstore bill. I'd just go in there and clean them out of SF, just buy them and read them, in addition to the stuff I was supposed to read.

SANDERSON: Do you see any connection between Heinlein's sometimes militarily oriented teams of heroes and the X-Men?

CLAREMONT: I think of the X-Men, Scott is probably the closest to a Heinlein character. Strong, self-reliant, human enough to doubt, ruthless if he needs to be, capable. Wolverine also applies somewhat.

SANDERSON: Wolverine?

CLAREMONT: Yes. If you look at something like *Starship Troopers*, Wolverine is the guy you depend on to get things done, no matter what it costs or what it takes. I think all of my characters tend to come out of that kind of mold. From reading Heinlein, I got this image of very strong, self-reliant men and women, boys and girls. If you read a Heinlein book, the center stage women—the kid in *Have Space Suit, Will Travel*, the little girl that Kip runs around with, *Podkayne of Mars*, though actually it's more her sibling than Podkayne, Jill in *Stranger*—all of them are actually very female and feminine but they're strong and can do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. Their

being female does not detract at all from their ability to function in a crisis. In *Starship Troopers*, for example, the grunts are all men, but the starships are all run by women. Which is something that I think Carmine [Infantino] and John Broome did in one of their "Space Museum" stories. For ten years the kid has been going to Space Museum with his mom and his dad, and they've been telling him stories, and they finally go to the Space Museum and they tell him a story about how space marine general Roughneck George—or whatever his name is—and Starfleet Admiral Christina so-and-so combined to outwit the alien invaders. And at the end of the story the kid goes, "Wait a minute! Your name is so-and-so! The story was about you, Mom and Dad!" And they go, "Yep, that's right." The delightful double throwaway was not only that a) the kid's parents were heroes, both of them, but b) that his mother was a four star fleet admiral in the space fleet. Of course, then there's the subtext that she has possibly given it all up to raise the kid, but on the other hand the implication is that they've both retired to raise the kid. So there's a very nice feminist/humanist subtext to that story which has always kind of intrigued me. And this was in 1962, 1963! DC was getting into some interesting ground there.

SANDERSON: *Hawkman and Hawkgirl were a very nice liberated team*

CLAREMONT: I wonder how much of that was [Joe] Kubert

SANDERSON: Well, once *Hawkman* got its own book, Kubert was gone, *Hawkgirl* was still the same liberated woman, so it was Fox who must have been responsible

CLAREMONT: It always seemed to me there was never any reason why a character should be any less heroic, courageous, intelligent, aggressive, simply because that character was a woman. It always seemed to me that a character—the characterization should evolve from the character itself and should not be bound by the fact that it is a male or a female. Males should be free to exhibit supposedly feminine traits, and vice-versa. My feeling is that they should be judged as people and then as women

SANDERSON: How about mainstream writers that have influenced you?

CLAREMONT: Well, T.H. White, if you can call him mainstream. Kipling

SANDERSON: Any particular stories of Kipling's?

CLAREMONT: *Puck of Pook's Hill*, *Just-So Stories*, *Kim*, *The Jungle Book*. E. Nesbitt, a Victorian writer—Edwardian, actually—wrote a series called "Five Children and It"—again, I'm going back to my childhood. James Joyce I enjoyed, once I finally got hooked on his work, which didn't happen until I was in



Moira MacTaggart debuts with a bang. [X-Men #96: Claremont-Cockrum-Grainger]

college.

SANDERSON: These, of course, are hardly adventure stories

CLAREMONT: No, I just enjoy the beauty of the language and the wealth of the characterization. Shaw, Arthur Conan Doyle, Jules Verne...

SANDERSON: Shakespeare

CLAREMONT: Shakespeare. H.G. Wells, who was a good friend—no, Conan Doyle was a good friend of my great-grandfather. My family gets around. A book here and a book there, but nothing that seminal.

SANDERSON: How about comics? Which writers do you most admire? Or most influenced you?

CLAREMONT: I don't know, it's hard to say. The writers I enjoyed reading the most were Stan and Roy, but both only on specific things. I enjoyed Stan's FF and Thor and to an extent *The Silver Surfer*; I never really got into Spider-Man, oddly enough. Roy I enjoyed on *The Avengers*, but not enough that I would buy it once John [Buscema] had been replaced by Sal Buscema. Conan was a whole different trip. Conan I loved from start to finish.

SANDERSON: Do you suppose you liked the FF and Thor because they were more science fiction or fantasy-oriented than Spider-Man?

CLAREMONT: I'm not sure. I think possibly. I think also that the mesh of Stan and Jack just worked better than the mesh of Stan and John [Romita].

SANDERSON: Or [Steve] Ditko?

CLAREMONT: I didn't read Ditko's stuff. Or I don't remember reading Ditko's stuff. By the time I got re-hooked on comics, we're talking '67, '68. Before that, I used to read comics pretty much when I'd go get my hair cut at the local barber shop. They'd have copies of



Storm vs. Wolverine on kill ing. [X-Men #142: Claremont-Byrne-Aust n]

the old Fly and The Blue Beetle and Rip Hunter, Time Master and Atomic Knights and Challengers of the Unknown and God, more bad art than I've seen in my life Superman, the Legion, Metal Men. I enjoyed Metal Men because of the idiosyncrasy of it. I enjoyed Denny [O'Neil]'s Green Lantern, I enjoyed Denny and Neal [Adams]'s Batman, but again, if I bought a Batman it was to read Denny and Neal, not just Denny. I did not buy books for the story, because I didn't find the story engrossing enough to make me suffer through what I thought was lame art. I enjoyed Skeates's Aquaman, while [Jim] Aparo was doing it, anyway Swamp Thing, when Len [Wein] and Berni [Wrightson] did it; I was awestruck. And when Berni first left and then Len left, I kept buying the book for another two years, but David [Michelinie] and Nestor Redondo's stuff just didn't hold the same zing. Russ Manning's stuff left me awestruck.

Comics—again, I have to go back to my childhood. When I was a kid, my grandmother would send me British comics magazine called Eagle which was probably the premier comic art newspaper. It was a tabloid of 20 odd pages a week. I grew up on Dan Dare which was first pencilled by Frank Hampson and then by Frank Bellamy. Dan Dare was science fiction. Visually I found the stuff eloquent; the stories I enjoyed the hell out of.

SANDERSON: Byrne seems to admire both Hampson and Frank Bellamy too.

CLAREMONT: I think if you talk to any modern comics art professional who grew up in England in the last twenty five years, you will find Hampson and Bellamy at the top of the list. It's just that no one else was doing that kind of stuff. That kind of beauty, that kind of power. Bellamy did a series called Heroes the

Spartan which was just [whistles] extraordinary. No other word could describe it.

SANDERSON: What did you like about the stories?

CLAREMONT: They were exciting. Grim as hell. Boy, were they fun. It was good strong adventure characterization. The stuff wasn't as kinked as modern comics are. Dan Dare was a hero. Period. The Mekon was a villain. The Mekon is a Venusian, Dare's bitterest enemy, but he was a villain with style. He was Doctor Doom. And I think that's where I began to get my sense that if one creates a villain, one must create a villain that has style. Even if he has no other socially redeeming qualities, he must have style. Panache. Arcade, for example, is a swine and a rotter, but he should have style. You should admire hischutzpah, if nothing else. Anyone who will go up to Doom and light a match on his armor and say, "Hey, Vic! How's it going?" as he lights his cigar—Starbuck strikes again.

Sidney Jordan's stuff impressed me as I grew older. He created a series called Jeff Hawke. Peter O'Donnell and Jim Holdaway's Modesty Blaise. Now I'm hooked on the French comics—Jean-Claude Mezieres's Valerian, Goscinny and Uderzo's Asterix. When I was growing up I was hooked on Herge's Tintin. This was stuff I enjoyed, because it's obvious that the people involved are having a good time and are putting thought, imagination, and care into their work, and that's something one sees less and less in mainstream American comics.

SANDERSON: O'Donnell, I expect, is influential to you perhaps principally because of his portrayal of women.

CLAREMONT: Mmmmm. to an extent, but I think he tended to reinforce tendencies and traits that already existed. The women in my family tend to be

very strong, or self-reliant. Capable. My mother was a sergeant in the Women's Royal Air Force during the war, was strafed a number of times, was continually being busted from sergeant to private for fraternizing with Americans, and getting promoted back to sergeant because she was good at her job. You could probably trace my head back a number of years and find a point from which this all comes. And in terms of my writing there was a moment I think when I made a conscious decision by looking around seeing how few people were portraying heroic rational sensible women in books and comics. I thought, "I'll fill the vacuum—since no one else is doing it, I'll give it a try." Because in a sense I wondered in the ultimate kind of fiction, science fiction, could I put myself in the head of this being who was totally unlike me? Also, I think to an extent it was also a means of escape: by dealing with these alien creatures I could avoid dealing with myself. A defense mechanism. All things are possible. And I just started doing it, and the more I did it the more right it seemed. For example, I have such disregard—to put it mildly—for John Norman's *Gor* series. "Men are men, and women are sluts." One of my "childish" fantasies when writing *Iron Fist* was to have the Gorean slave raiders land on Earth by mistake and swipe Misty and Colleen. *Iron Fist* and company borrow an Avengers spaceship and fly to *Gor* only to discover that in the interim the two women have just about wiped out every army on *Gor* and conquered the place.

SANDERSON: Well, to an extent you have done stories like that. Mastermind mentally enslaves Jean and she finally turns on him...

CLAREMONT: To an extent. But it just so incensed me that a series, book after book—there are 14 of these, that series has been in existence since 1965—and it is extraordinarily popular. It seemed to me that it was such a one-sided portrayal and it said things about interpersonal relationships, about characterizations, about people, that I did not agree with, and felt should be countered. But in comic books, for example, for twenty years women had been portrayed as the girlfriend. It really infuriated me, for example, in *Brave and the Bold* #100, Batman has been shot, he's dying, Robin and Green Arrow are running around Gotham City trying to find clues, and where is Black Canary? In the middle of the story she goes into a hairdresser to get her hair done!

SANDERSON: And it's a wig, too.

CLAREMONT: It's a wig, too. I thought, "How cruel." *Avengers* #199, where Carol Danvers is introduced to the Avengers, and they're told that in two days she has become eight months pregnant by an unknown father, or by force of persons unknown, and the reaction of the entire crowd, men and women



Proteus, the mutant who can "alter reality," takes possession of his father's body and captures his mother, Moira MacTaggart. [*X-Men* #127; Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

both, is to the effect of "Can I babysit?" "Can we knit booties?" "Can I make cookies for the baby?" "Oh you must be so happy?" and my reaction was, "What an insensitive crowd of boors." Actually, my reaction was a lot stronger than that. But now callous! How cruel! How unfeeling! Considering that these people must have seen Ms. Marvel only a couple of days before, or even a couple of months before. She wasn't pregnant then. How could she be eight months pregnant now? Now, if that had been the point David [Michelinie] was trying to make, that these other Avengers are callous boors, okay then, I may disagree with the point, but if he followed through on it, it would have made sense. But it seemed to me, looking at the story, looking at the following story, that he was going for: "This is how you respond to a pregnancy."

As Carol [Strickland] pointed out in her article in *LOC* [#1], women tend to get very short shrift in comics. They are either portrayed as wallflowers or as supermacho insensitive men with different body forms, who almost invariably feel guilty about their lack of femininity. And it's always seemed to me that, why does this have to be exclusive? Can you not have a woman who is ruthless and capable and courageous and articulate and intelligent and all the other buzzwords—heroic when the need arises, and yet feminine and gentle and compassionate, at others? That was what I tried to do with Ms. Marvel. I tried to create a character who had all the attributes that made her a top



Kitty's ballet teacher Stevie Hunter [X-Men #139
Claremont-Byrne Austin]

secret agent yet at the same time was a compassionate, warm, humorous, witty, intelligent, attractive woman.

SANDERSON: And yet a number of people have said in print that they didn't see that side of Ms. Marvel at all. You've often been accused of creating these super-macho women.

CLAREMONT: Well, as far as Ms. Marvel is concerned there may be some justification for that. Again, it goes back to how some writers and artists mesh. Jim Mooney and I never meshed. We always seemed to work at cross purposes. I would tell him things that seemed perfectly obvious to me, and he would view them from a totally different perspective. Things I wrote into the script to show her humor—the snowball fight, for example—didn't work. They invariably misfired. I think Dave and I could have done it...

SANDERSON: And she did have scenes where she showed deep friendships with people, her astronaut friend, the new boyfriend she was getting...

CLAREMONT: I think the most successful issue prior to Dave's was the one Carmine [Infantino] and Steve [Leialoha] and I did with her father, and I did that for a very simple reason, partly to show the relationship, to start explaining why she became a secret agent and Ms. Marvel and all that other stuff, but also to show a more human dimension to her. She's fighting for the life of her father. But again, unfortunately this is something you have to live with in comics, that you are not always going to get from your artist that which you thought you would. Another case in point would be John Carter. Ernie Colon and I just did not mesh at all, whereas the Frank Miller story is awesome in its potential. I mean, Frank sat down and created a full four-

handed fighting style for Tharks. He figured out how guys with four arms would fight with swords and it's great! You look at that story—I looked at that story and felt, "Well, the faces and the women are weak, but boy, is the storytelling something else!" And anyone looking at that story would know that Frank was going places. Because he was thinking.

In a sense it's ironic, because I was offered *Spider-Woman* after I got off *Ms. Marvel*, but I turned it down because I didn't want to get typecast as writing nothing but women books and *Spider-Woman* had seemed like such a loser that I didn't want to get into it. I didn't want to work with the artist who was working on it, and yet with Steve [Leialoha], now that we are teamed up on *Spider-Woman*, I think we're doing everything I'd wanted to do conceptually with *Ms. Marvel* in terms of creating a three-dimensional heroic female character, and it's working really nicely. We think alike in what we want. We're trying to create a character who is physically attractive and emotionally attractive and intellectually attractive. She is strong, she has doubts, she has fears, she has hopes, she has dreams, she is witty, she has good luck, she has bad luck, and she is a hero.

SANDERSON: *Ms. Marvel* isn't the only character who's come in for this sort of criticism. People have also said that all of Claremont's women characters are these macho-types: very strong, very tough, but very cold emotionally. And, in fact, that all of Claremont's women are the same character! How do you respond to that kind of criticism? It does come up again and again.

CLAREMONT: There are similarities between the characters, in part because the women characters—you're talking about Misty, Colleen, Storm, Jean and Phoenix, and *Ms. Marvel*, and *Spider-Woman* are all heroic characters. They are leads: they are people who are in functionally dangerous occupations. Jean was an experienced super hero; Storm is a goddess, who's been a super-hero for three years; *Ms. Marvel* was a secret agent, and even if you ignore that, she was also security chief of Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, which betokens a degree of police or security training before she became a super hero; *Spider-Woman* worked for Hydra and is a super-hero; Colleen is a Samurai, and Misty is an ex-cop. There is a certain commonality of occupation there. So, yes, they should all have a degree of courage and intelligence and ruthlessness and ability to function under fire and pressure, the same as any male hero would have. I think there is a certain commonality of characterization among a number of male heroes written, not just by me but by others.

Lindsay McCabe [in *Spider-Woman*] is intelligent,



The horrifying death of the Wolverine of X-Men #142's alternate future (Claremont-Byrne-Austin)

attractive, courageous, warm, loving, all those other things—and plucky. Lee Forrester the whole point of her character in *The X-Men* is that this is a woman who can sail her trawler through the teeth of the worst hurricane in history, but is unnerved to find herself caught in a super-hero conflict between Magneto and Cyclops, not because she's a coward or anything like that, but because this is something that is totally divorced from and beyond her experience. She doesn't know how to deal with it.

Moving right along, Lilandra is Empress of a galactic empire, Dejah Thoris [in *John Carter*] is a Princess of Barsoom, and if you don't think [Edgar Rice] Burroughs wrote Princesses of Barsoom to be formidable foes, you're obviously unfamiliar with the books. Satanna is the Devil's daughter.

SANDERSON: But, even your female characters who are not cast as heroes of series—as you say, Lindsay, Moira, Barbara Bannister [in *Man-Thing*] tend to be plucky.

CLAREMONT: Yes.

SANDERSON: So it's obvious you like writing this kind of character.

CLAREMONT: I have no interest in writing ditzes. Jim Shooter once challenged me to write a mindless bimbo. And I said, I'll give it a try, and so I created Harmony Young [the fashion model] in *Luke Cage*. Her first reaction after a roof falls on her head is "Oh, my God, my nails!" Archie [Goodwin] said he didn't want a ditz; he didn't mind her being less aggressive than the others, but he didn't want a caricature or a cliché. He wanted her to have some redeeming qualities. So, I evolved her from a ditz into what would have been a nice, normal fashion mode.

I tend to write characters—and perhaps this is a

weakness—that I like, that I would like to know, and given the situations in which the characters in the books find themselves, they tend to come out of a certain basic mold.

On the other hand, I was trying something with Joy Meachum [in *Iron Fist*]. What I wanted to create there was a woman who is not cold and ruthless and aggressive by nature, nor oriented toward power, but who was forced into those attitudes by circumstances beyond her control, and it's destroying her, because she's being made to do things that she is characteristically, constitutionally unequipped to do. But, because I was bounced off the series, I was never able to carry that plotline through to its fruition. I don't know what plans [Mary] Jo [Duffy] has.

Again, it goes back to what I was saying before—that simply because a character is strong and heroic and a protagonist does not preclude that character's being warm and sympathetic and loving. I think that in *Spider-Woman* vis-a-vis Jessica's relationship with Lindsay, and now her relationship with David Mishima, we are expanding on the fact that there is a woman here and that she has needs that her role as a super-hero does not fulfill.

SANDERSON: What do you think of the theory that perhaps a lot of your woman characters are stronger than the men in the sense that they seem to have fewer doubts and to be in more tune with their feelings. For example, take Scott in his relationships with Jean and Colleen, who are both more emotional than he is. Both try to draw him out and take the initiative at times in their dealings with him.

CLAREMONT: They take the male role. They ask him for the date. Lee's doing the same thing. They have to. Scott is a shy, reserved loner who will not



Jean first senses the dark side of the Phoenix power [X-Men #105 Claremont Cockrum-Layton]

—cannot—make the first move. He has to be drawn out.

SANDERSON: To an extent I think it was true of *Iron Fist* and *Colleen*, too.

CLAREMONT: The same thing applies. A person who grew up in a male-oriented warrior society, someone who'd seen both his parents killed before his eyes, who came back solely to kill the man who killed his family, is not going to be Mr. Warmth or Mr. Nice Guy.

SANDERSON: And is also going to be a loner.

CLAREMONT: Yes. What I was trying to set up with *Iron Fist* was that this was a kid.

With reference to what I was saying before about the writer/artist relationship, *Iron Fist* was a book in which John Byrne and I meshed really well. The scene that comes to mind is where Danny Rand is walking through his house in #8 looking for ghosts. John gave me everything I asked for and more. He was as pleased by the scripting as I was by the art. The idea that we wanted to set up was that *Iron Fist* is still in many ways a child, a Valentine Michael Smith [from Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*], a stranger in his own land. We wanted to show him growing up. We had a sort of paradox: if one is as grand and glorious a martial artist as he is, one has to be in tune with his own inner self, one's chi must be centered, and one has to be totally aware of the people around him. What Danny lacked was experience; what he lacked was contact. The only two people he knew in K'un-L'un were Miranda and Conal, his half sister and her lover, and he lost them before he left to come to Earth. The inference was that he wasn't very close to anyone. What he needed was someone to be the right person in the right place at the right time, and Misty was it. She was his other half. Love at first sight, literally.

As for the women being stronger, I think that isn't altogether valid. In *Spider Woman*, Mishima makes the first move. He's the one who invites Jessica out to his garden; he's the one who massages her shoulders and moves in for the kill.

SANDERSON: And she's the former loner.

CLAREMONT: Right. It works both ways.

In *The X-Men*, there really aren't that many opportunities now. It's hard to say what would happen in Storm's case. I think someone would have to make the first move to her because she wouldn't know how. She has no social graces per se. She wouldn't know how to walk up to someone and say, "I like you, would you like to dance?"

SANDERSON: How would you compare Cockrum's handling of *The X-Men* to Byrne's?

CLAREMONT: Something completely different. John's material is cleaner. John tends to excel in the quiet scenes—in the characterization scenes, the dialogue scenes. Dave tends to excel in the action scenes. This is not to say that John does action badly, or Dave does characterization badly. Far from it. It's just their particular forte. Dave's characters tend to be much bigger on the comics page; the forms tend to be much blockier, stockier than John's. Even when John was drawing someone with a massive chest, he made the characters seem slim. Also, different artists like different characters. John liked Wolverine very much, he did not like Nightcrawler. Therefore, Wolverine tended to get far more play than Nightcrawler. And when Nightcrawler got play, it tended to be in an unsuccessful manner. In other words, he would try to do something and get bopped on his head. Dave, on the other hand, likes Nightcrawler, and used not to like Wolverine, but has since said that my writing has convinced him to like Wolverine. So, Nightcrawler gets more play and does more responsible things. He helps out, he functions as part of the team. John's antipathy toward Phoenix as a character was one of the primary motivations behind the entire decision to begin a Dark Phoenix storyline and get rid of her, or at least change her in such a way that she could not remain on the team as Phoenix, whereas Dave co-created her with me and obviously felt a great deal of affection for her.

John is somewhat easier to work with in that he and I will talk stuff out on the phone and I will send him a plot and he will sit down and two to three weeks later, I'll get the art back. Whereas with Dave, he and I will sit down and we'll work out a plot, or I'll send him a plot, and depending on his mood, it could take two weeks or it could take two months. John sits down and sets himself to pencil three pages a day or two pages a day. And he'll do it. Whereas with Dave it often depends on his mood. In that, he's a lot like me. Some days I'll write fif-



You can't go home again. Jean Grey returns to her parents' house as Dark Phoenix [X-Men #136 Claremont Byrne-Austin]

teen pages. some days I won't write any. I find it very hard just to write six pages day in, day out, day in, day out. My mind just goes prfff And I think Dave's much the same way. You write when your inner voices mesh, or pencil when they mesh. The work he produces is invariably excellent: it just takes him a lot more effort to get it out. I think both he and I wish we could produce our stuff with a lot more ease and regularity. In certain respects, I think John's rendering of Colossus—especially when inked by Terry Austin—was really nice. John draws metal as well or better than anyone I know. I think Dave has an understanding of Storm that is far more in tune with my understanding of her than John's was. The idea of presenting Storm always looking exotic, even in the most normal of clothes—she should always manage to look like someone from an African Shangri-La—was something John never quite captured. I don't know whether it's because I never expressed it to him in a way that he understood what I was getting at, or he just didn't agree with me. John creates neat aliens. So does Dave. John draws neat starships. So does Dave. John draws a neat Magneto. So does Dave. In a very real sense, it's a lot like comparing apples and oranges. They are both good on a level where comparisons become a matter of taste, not of quality. What more can I say?

There are things that make Dave easier to work with than John: there are things that make John easier to work with than Dave. And I'm sure they could give you chapter and verse on me as well, about my giving plots designed more for fifty page books than twenty-two pages. Stuff like that.

SANDERSON: To what extent do John and Dave co-plot The X-Men with you?

CLAREMONT: Generally, the way I like to work on

this book, and the way John and I would generally work on the book, would be that one of us would have a specific idea. John wanted to do a Canada story involving Alpha Flight. Or the future history story I wanted to do the Hellfire Club. I would call him up with some ideas jotted down on a pad or I would say, "Do you have any ideas?" and we would discuss it back and forth, and we would evolve a framework of things we wanted to do, things we wanted to see, characters we wanted to use. From there I would write up a plot: a specific, incident-by-incident breakdown of what we wanted to do with the story. I would then call him back and say, "OK, this is the plot I've worked out," and I'd go through it. If John had a question or a complaint or a comment, we'd discuss it, and I'd either incorporate it into the plot or not. So that by the time I actually gave the plot to Salicrup or Louise, or Stern, John and I would have agreed between ourselves on what we wanted to do, unless the editor had a change he or she made. After that, depending on how John felt as he pencilled the story, he would rearrange or modify certain sequences to suit him artistically in terms of storytelling. For example, in #142, there was the fight in the Capitol. The way it was structured in the plot is that the X-Men are in the hearing room, the fight begins, Wolverine lunges for Pyro with his claws extended, Storm whirls him away, grabs him in mid air, and says, "No killing. Not here. You're on national television. Put those claws away." She reads him the riot act right off the bat, and then they go into the fight. John felt, I suppose, that that would not work, so he waited until they were two-thirds of the way through the fight on the Mall, and then had everything stop dead, and staged the confrontation between Storm and Wolverine, which a number of readers found to be very awkward.



Byrne portrays Dark Phoenix's chilling inhumanity through her simple understated facial expression and its contrast with the agony she causes Colossus. [X-Men #136: Claremont Byrne-Austin]

Why stop in the middle of a fight, they wondered, when the bad guys are standing right over there, to have an argument? Obviously, it made sense to John; otherwise he wouldn't have drawn it that way. I honestly don't remember the rationale behind it. He restructured elements of the fight between Proteus and the X-Men in Edinburgh from the way I broke it down in the story to a way which felt more comfortable to him. That's his prerogative as a penciller.

SANDERSON: And added the death scenes in the future history's final fight.

CLAREMONT: Yes. The death of the X-Men. Beyond a certain point, things tend to blur—at least to me, anyway—as to who was responsible for a plot. I tend to think we, the collaborators, are both equally responsible for the plot. John obviously felt otherwise, which is why he demanded full credit for the Canada story [#139-140], because he felt that I had contributed nothing to the plot, which is inaccurate. The scene with Stevie and Storm was mine, for example. John felt that didn't count. That was a characterization sidebar which we could put in anywhere; it was not integral to that storyline. John feels very strongly that credit must be given where he feels credit is due. Therefore, if he had nothing to do with the plot of a story, he didn't want any plotting credit for it. On the other hand, if he has plotting input, he wants a co-plotter credit, and if he feels he created the plot completely, then he wants a complete plotting credit. From there you can get into

all manner of arguments as to which is which. One can say this is an unfair point to take since John as the penciller had the *de facto* authority to cut out everything of mine that was in the story, and only leave in the material that was his. For various and sundry reasons—some valid, some judgmental—he might decide to “x out” certain scenes and if they all happen to be my scenes, well, then, it's his plot. The argument could go on *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseum* to no purpose. I viewed it at the start as a collaboration. I saw no sense in imposing my will as writer, which I was technically empowered to do. I mean, I can insist as writer that the artist follow everything that is in the plot *exactly* as it is in the plot. But when you're dealing with an artist who's as effective a storyteller, an evocative a storyteller as John, that's insane, that's stupid. You're cutting off your nose to spite your face. Again, I always viewed our work as a collaboration. I would give a little, he would give a little.

SANDERSON: And the proportion would vary according to the story.

CLAREMONT: Yes. After that, you have to ask yourself, “Fine, all right, these are the pictures, this is the structure, but then are not the words that evolve from that plot or scenario also creative input?” The distinctions get very, very blurred. As Denny [O’Neil] has pointed out, the only real way for a writer to guarantee 100% that the story is his, not the artist's, is to write a full script and insist that every panel be done exactly as described. But giving a script like that to someone like Byrne or [John] Buscema or Cockrum is stupidity because these people are paid to bring their own ability to tell a story to that story, and if you don't utilize it, you're a fool. Unfortunately, then you can, and we did, get to a point where creative people feel their creative input is not being properly acknowledged or that their input is being subverted. In other words, something is put down in the pencils and the writer then writes copy that is at variance with the scene or that does not relate to the scene as the penciller intended. The writer can then counter by saying, “Well, this was the scene I had in mind and the art was at variance with what I intended.” Sometimes when one is dealing with intensely creative people with intense egos, both working on a product about which the two creators care quite a lot, conflict can arise. Sometimes that conflict can be worked out, a compromise can be effected, a *modus vivendi*. But sometimes it gets to the point where both creators—or one creator—feel that continued association with each other on this particular book is counterproductive. That further work on it would be hackwork. And I am deliberately not using names in this analysis. I'm speaking in general terms. This has happened before with innumerable teams and will happen again with innumerable

able teams, because we are all creative people and we are all egotists. We couldn't be creative people if we didn't have the ego to sustain it. I don't mean egotist in a pejorative sense. And when one is that good and when one cares that much, it is unfortunately inevitable at some point that one butts heads with the person one is working with, and at that point, someone has to give, or both have to give, and sometimes, as I said before, a point is reached where neither party is prepared or willing to give, at which point the creative team goes its separate ways. It's very sad, but it's a fact of life. One should no more try to force someone to stay on a book when the person wants to leave than one should try to assign a person to a book he does not want to be on.

The reason I spoke in general, generic terms is that this is a situation endemic to the creative process. It happens in the theatre. Rodgers and Hart broke up, and after Oscar Hammerstein II died, Richard Rodgers couldn't get together with anybody again with the same sense. The Beatles broke up.

SANDERSON: *Gilbert and Sullivan.*

CLAREMONT: *Ford and Nixon.*

It is something that is endemic to the creative process. Sooner or later circumstances just get too intense. It is no one's fault, and it is to no one's discredit that such a thing could happen. It simply happens. It's a function of being human, of being a creative person.

SANDERSON: *Would you agree with John's assessment in his interview in The Art of John Byrne that most of the action bits in X-Men are his and most of the characterization bits are yours?*

CLAREMONT: Well, again, most of the action is visual; that means it comes from the artist. Most characterization is verbal; it comes from the writer. So in that sense, yes. In another sense, when I write a plot, I try as much as possible to offer suggestions for things that can be done in an action sequence: what a villain can do to a hero, what the hero can do to the villain, ways to utilize the powers—such things as Nightcrawler's multiple teleports, variations on Storm's powers so that she doesn't always create a rainstorm or utilize lightning. Something that I thought up after the fact, for example, comes in the future history story [#141] where she blasts the Sentinel with a lightning bolt, and then on the next page even though she's shooting what seems to be a lightning bolt, the copy says that she's



Geraldo Rivera reports on humanity's hatred of mutants. [X-Men #99: Claremont Cockrum Chiaramonte]

freezing the Sentinel, dropping its temperature to almost zero degrees Kelvin cold. It struck me when I saw that scene that all Storm's done in the story is shoot lightning bolts. Suppose the Sentinel was insulated? But, on the other hand, one of the most superb bits of characterization I've ever seen is in *Iron Fist* #13 where Misty and Iron Fist have this impassioned argument about this ex-terrorist friend of Iron Fist's Alan Cavanaugh—and she walks out on him, saying, essentially, "If that's the way you feel about this guy, I don't want to see you again." She leaves, and John drew this long, thin panel with Iron Fist's head heavily shadowed in the left hand side, black space, and then on the right hand side, the panel breaks into shards as if someone had shattered a glass pane. It was superb. John visually caught everything that needed to be said. And there were no words in that panel. It didn't need words.

SANDERSON: *John had strong ideas even in non-visual terms about Wolverine's personality and Kitty's.*

CLAREMONT: Oh, of course. A lot of these we discussed to a great extent. But here also we have differing views. I think he felt uncomfortable with the genius aspect of Kitty's personality. I made her the genius of the team because we didn't have one, and I felt the team needed somebody with a brain—somebody who could whip up gadgets in an instant, who could explain things, understand things—a Beast character, a Reed Richards, a Tony Stark. Every team needs one. The X-Men didn't have one.

There are things that grow out of the art. The point



Bolivar Trask's nightmarish vision of a world ruled by super-powered mutants. [X-Men #14: Lee Kirby(layouts)-"Gavin"(Roth finished pencils)-Colletta]

relates back to what I was saying before, that the creative process is ongoing. It begins with the first idea of the story and goes on until the book goes to press or until it's inked, until it's set down on paper. Then it's pretty much cast as close to stone as one can get, though there have been a lot of changes made afterwards. Again, speaking in terms of purely visual characterizations, there's the smile on Phoenix's face in #136 as she approaches Colossus. On the other hand, a combination of visual and literal characterization would be two pages earlier where Jean's father says, "Who's that?" and she smiles and says, "Would you believe the wicked witch of the west?" That's John giving me an idea, and me taking it and going a little further, expanding positively on it.

Hopefully, the reverse is also true. Well, the Iron Fist ghost scene. I told John what I wanted in the plot, John took it, I looked at that scene, and went, "Aha!" That sparked my imagination, I wrote the scene, and it was one of the most effective pieces I've done. And that's now it should be. And it's all too rare in books. But that's what it's all about. As far as John and I are concerned, I think his assessment is accurate to a point. Beyond that point, everything gets very blurred and

very ambiguous.

SANDERSON: Then what about working with Cockrum?

CLAREMONT: The way Dave ideally likes to work is that he and I and Louise sit down in the office for a couple of hours and brainstorm a story. I have a starting point or he has a starting point and we just come up with ideas and go. The process is very effective but it takes a lot of time. I tried writing a full script. Disaster from the very beginning. I tried writing a plot. Dave asked if I could break it down into pages. I broke it down into pages; he didn't like that. We've tried fifteen different ways. Dave breaks the story down, calls me up and says, "The story is broken down, it's 25 pages, we've gotta lose three pages worth of material," so we lose three pages worth of material. It's a synthesis. I give him ideas. Here is a fight. Well, how about something like this: Nightcrawler is standing between two guys, they fire their blasters at him and as they do he teleports and they shoot each other [145]. Angel does this, Wolverine does this, Colossus does this, and Nightcrawler does this. Dave prefers me to choreograph the fights partly because if I

just say "Fight scene," he's worried he'll just draw people hitting each other and not do it in an inventive fashion.

I view the descriptions of fights, the choreography of a fight, as a template and the artist can either use it or embellish it or change it—as long as the changes are improvements. I personally tend to view the characterization as far more critical to the story than punching and hitting, so I'll tend to be far more specific and detailed in the plot about what I want in terms of characterization than I will about a fight. So, in that sense, John is right. Action is generally up to the artist, characterization is generally up to me.

However, Dave is free to modify it as he wishes. I've preferred if he would call me if there's going to be any major change, and he does. We synthesize it. For example, in the third part of the Doom story [147], the way the original plot evolved, Storm has gone crazy she's about to destroy everything, the X-Men are trying to talk her out of it. She's not crazy any more, she's trying to disperse the hurricane that she's created, but she's not strong enough, and Doom has this machine that will help her in his laboratory. So, the X-Men help him get to the laboratory and Doom picks up the ma-

cine and zap helps Storm, thereby proving he is not a cad and a boulder and giving the X-Men incentive not to punch his lights out at the end of the story. Well, we ran out of room, so we dumped the scene. That didn't really bother me, because I didn't like the idea of Storm being helped. If one is going to be heroic, one should go all the way. Storm should do this by herself. But, that's an example of what happens. Things get lost, things get changed. It's a mutable process from start to finish.

SANDERSON: How would you compare your various editors on the book?

CLAREMONT: In chronological order, the editors have been Len [Wein], Marv [Wolfman], Gerry [Conway], Archie [Goodwin]—and under Archie, Jim [Shooter]—[Roger] Stern, [Jim] Salicrup, Louise [Jones]. Louise has been the best, by far.

SANDERSON: Why's that?

CLAREMONT: Because she's smart enough to leave me alone and to trust that Dave and I—or John and I—know what we're doing. And smart enough to know that if there is something that bothers her, she should ask about it. When she asks about it, the questions she asks are invariably intelligent and the comments she makes are invariably accurate and to the point. The relationship between myself as a writer and herself as the editor is one of collaboration and trust whereas all too often in the past, relationships with editors have been characterized by mistrust and an adversary nature. She cares about the book.

SANDERSON: What would you say about the other people who've worked on the book—Terry Austin, Joe Rubinstein, Tom Orzechowski, and Glynis Wein?

CLAREMONT: The X-Men is a book which has, over the past six years, invariably brought out the best in the people who've worked on it. Glynis asked to be assigned the book on a regular basis, which is very rare for a colorist, almost unheard of. Tom asked to be assigned to it on a regular basis as a letterer. They've both fulfilled that position with very few exceptions for the better part of two and a half years, and hopefully will continue to do so for the better part of God knows how many more years. I've said it before, that I think John and Terry are the third classic seminal art team in modern comic book history.

SANDERSON: The other two being...?

CLAREMONT: Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott, and Neal



In a flashback, the alien Lucifer oppresses Charles Xavier [X-Men #20: Thomas "Gavin" Roth finished pencils; Colletta]

Adams and Dick Giordano. Not because they are better *per se* than anyone else, or that they are breaking new artistic ground. It is just the way the pencils and inks mesh. Sinnott complemented Kirby better than anyone I've ever seen. Dick complemented Neal better than anyone I've ever seen. Terry complemented John better than anyone I've ever seen. It's just extraordinary. They played to each other's strengths. I was in awe. Mind you, I was impressed enough with John's pencils, but when I saw what Terry did with the inks, I was just stunned. And, again, Tom's lettering complemented the art; Glynis's colors complemented the art.

I think Josef inks Dave better than virtually anyone I've ever seen for the same reason. He complements the pencils; they play to each other's strengths. He takes things that Dave does and gives them a certain realistic texture. He manages to capture all the deft characterizational strokes. Again, it's bringing out Josef's best work, it's bringing out Dave's best work, and hopefully it's bringing out my best work. That's what any book should do.

SANDERSON: How does being an actor influence your writing?

CLAREMONT: Positively and negatively. Positive in

the sense that I try to write naturalistic dialogue, realistic dialogue. Negative in the sense that I generally play the scene in my head as I'm writing it or after I've written it, and regrettably when I do that, I'm hearing it with vocal inflections, I'm hearing it acted, so a line which has a multiple meaning will have a specific meaning in my head, whereas someone reading it in black and white on paper could conceivably have a totally different response. I hope it tends to give me a certain ability to set scenes and to choreograph relationships, and understanding of people and situations, but mostly I think it gives me the ease in dialogue.

SANDERSON: You've said in the past to me that you see parallels between the situation of mutants as presented in *The X-Men* and the situation with Jewish people. Could you expand on that?

CLAREMONT: Not just Jews. *The X-Men* is the only Marvel book I'm aware of that, when it was started, had a specific theme, that theme being that humanity hates mutants simply because they exist. Jonah Jameson hated Spider-Man, but Jonah was always portrayed as a boob or as an aberration from society's norm. And for all of Jameson's excess, he was balanced by the sanity of Robbie Robertson. But the X-Men are hated, feared, and despised collectively by humanity for no other reason than that they are mutants. So what we have here, intended or not, is a book that is about racism, bigotry, and prejudice. That gives it a very possibly far heavier thematic structure than is perhaps intended for [mainstream] comic books, but I think that's one of the things that's given the book its endearing nature over the years. It's a book about outsiders, about people who are beyond the pale, so to speak, which is something that any teenager can identify with. It is a story about downtrodden, repressed people fighting to change their situation, which I think anybody can empathize with. And it's a book through which we can say certain specific things about the human condition that might not be as easily said in, say, *The Avengers*.

For example, *The Avengers* took two issues out to do a Sons of the Serpents story about bigotry against blacks. *The X-Men* has been doing bigotry stories since the first Sentinels story, over 130 issues ago. It's never been stated, but it's been a subtext: "We are mutants. We are feared. We are hated."

SANDERSON: You had people wearing uniforms with letters on them and living in prison camps, and a reference to gas chambers.

CLAREMONT: Yes. The Jewish situation is the most obvious genocidal example in the human experience. Cambodia is probably the second. It's something that all of us can relate to and that all of us should relate to. We got quite a few letters recently from a number of gay fans, who believe that *The X-Men* makes positive

subliminal statements about gay rights. They identify very strongly with the X-Men's position because gays are hated and feared simply because they exist.

SANDERSON: Hence any alienated individual or group can identify with the mutants.

CLAREMONT: Uh huh.

SANDERSON: Do you feel that considering that the mutants in the X-Men have super powers that there is the danger that you could be presenting a super race theme with fascistic overtones?

CLAREMONT: No. The super-powers are a convention of the genre. The super-race theme, which is what Magneto believes in, would be defeating our own purpose. We would be doing that which the book is really dedicated against. The whole *raison d'être* of the X-Men as a team is to get humanity to a point in time where humans and mutants can coexist peacefully and achieve their fullest potential as individuals without one group fearing the other. It may conceivably be that in the overall scheme of things mutants will evolve into the inheritors of the Earth from *homo sapiens*, but that's something that is not germane to the book. At this point we are dealing with the mutants as individuals and as a minority, and as a repressed minority.

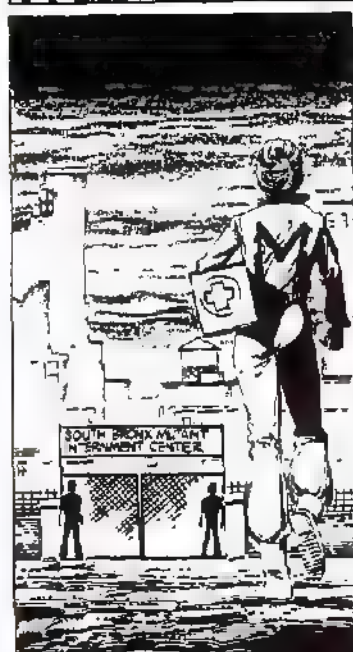
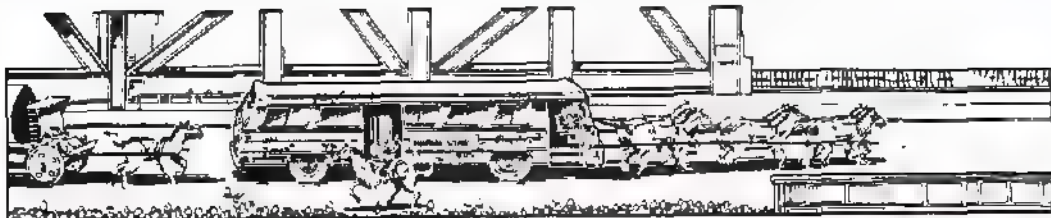
SANDERSON: Indeed, Senator Kelly's speech in the *Future History* story [#141] extends the theme of repression born from fear to all super-powered beings.

CLAREMONT: Of course, because super-powered beings presumably can have super-powered children. The difference is that a super-powered being who is a non-mutant variant is created by an accident, whereas a mutant is born. You can at least control the incidents that lead to the creation of super beings—the FF, Spider-Man. You cannot control the birth of a child. At least, you couldn't control the birth of a child, with all the advances in genetic engineering, one never knows.

SANDERSON: Now I'm going to ask you about individual characters. What is the difference between Magneto and Dr. Doom in terms of their personalities?

CLAREMONT: Doom, to me anyway, is power for the sake of power. Once power is achieved, he can be the most benevolent of dictators. But all power rests with him. Magneto is fighting for a goal, the preservation, the enhancement of mutantkind. So of the two, I would say possibly Magneto has the more noble motives, but from there on you're just getting into matters of style rather than substance.

SANDERSON: You seem to be changing Magneto, to emphasize this noble goal more and more [#150]. Some people would argue that in the past, Magneto has seemed to be basically just out for power and that he believed he should have power because he's a mutant.



The Sentinels' dictatorship in an alternate Marvel-Earth future. The use of technology by humans has been severely restricted. "Pure" humans wear 'H' on their clothes and mutants, who are confined to prison camps, wear 'M.' Here Kate Pryde, Kitty's adult self, returns to her camp and passes by the graves of the superheroes murdered by the Sentinels [X-Men #141 Claremont-Byrne-Austin]



The two faces of Raven Darkholme of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants [X-Men #141: Claremont-Byrne-Aust n]

CLAREMONT: Sure. Why not? My response to that is that my Magneto is a totally different person. He has gotten a second chance. He was reduced to infancy, remember, by Alpha, Len's evolved mutant. And was since, by Eric the Red, bopped back into adulthood, younger than before, in the prime of his life [#104]. It's as if he's never been defeated and never fought anyone; he's as he was before he attacked Cape Citadel [#1]. He now has the opportunity to start again with full awareness of the mistakes he made the first time. You know, whatever megalomania he might have had then, he might not have now. Or he might understand it for what it is and cope with it, get rid of it. I changed him because I have no interest in two dimensional villains, except maybe in a one-shot story, perhaps. But Magneto is the major villain of the X-Men book; he is their opposite number. He should be at least as interesting and credible as they are. To my way of thinking, a hero is measured by his or her antagonists. And if the antagonist is a wimp, then the hero becomes a wimp. For example, when the X-Men fought Moses Magnum in #119, my thinking was: Here's Moses Magnum fighting the X-Men to a standstill. The readers will say, "Wow, this guy is pretty strong!" Nope. He fought them to a standstill and the readers all said, "What the hell happened to the X-Men? They can't defeat this one creep?" We read *Power Man*. This guy's a jerk. Get rid of 'im!" to coin a phrase. So, Dave and I deliberately spent time making Magneto a credible foe.

SANDERSON: A villain has to have a strong personality as well as powers.

CLAREMONT: Yes. He has to be intelligent; he has to be courageous. Frank Miller has spent #170 of *Daredevil* building up the Kingpin. It's a Kingpin story with a few scenes of *Daredevil*, because when Frank brings Kingpin back, he wants the reader to be aware that this guy is a force to be reckoned with. It involves taking care, taking trouble, and taking time to think about the who, what, where, when, and why of your villains as intensely as one does about the heroes.

SANDERSON: Well, then, let's compare Magneto and Xavier.

CLAREMONT: They're very much alike. They have

the same goals, the protection and enhancement of mutantkind. There was a line that I'd had in mind for Wolverine at one point when Scott and Jean leave the X-Men [in the original version of #138]. Xavier would be sitting there saying, "Why are you going? Please stay." Xavier feels very upset and guilt ridden. Then Wolverine turns to him and says, "Hey Chuck! You know the only difference between you and Magneto?" And Xavier says, "What?" Wolverine takes a drag on his cheroot and says, "He can walk." And leaves. And Xavier realizes that he's right. Magneto is ruthless, Xavier is ruthless. Magneto is cruel; Xavier is cruel.

SANDERSON: Their goals are somewhat different, though.

CLAREMONT: Magneto believes the ends justify the means; Xavier believes the ends justify the means. Magneto has thought of the X-Men as functional inferiors. Xavier thinks of the X-Men as students, who are *ipso facto* functional inferiors. The fundamental difference is that Magneto believes the only way mutant kind can assert itself in the modern world is by taking it over, by change from above. Xavier believes that the only way that this can be done effectively is that the change must evolve from below. People must learn to trust the X-Men; they cannot be told or forced to trust them. And I believe he's right. I don't believe that that kind of moral change in attitude can be imposed. It has to be learned; it has to evolve naturally. It's the harder of the two roads, but in the end it's the only one that really has a chance of success.

SANDERSON: There must also be limits to the degree of cruelty and ruthlessness Xavier will exhibit compared to Magneto.

CLAREMONT: The difference also is that Xavier is growing out of it, Xavier is growing to realize what he is and what he has done in the past. In a sense, a lot of those assessments—the cruelty, the ruthlessness, the "ends justify the means" aspect—grow out of a hindsight review of sixty-five issues of the book.

SANDERSON: I think many people will be surprised that you say Xavier is cruel and ruthless. Why do you say this?

CLAREMONT: In issue #5, Xavier tells the X-Men

that "my power is lost, I cannot direct you," and sends them out after Magneto. They fight him in New York City, they go up to Asteroid M, they beat the beans out of him on their own, and return successfully. Then Xavier reveals "I was just kidding. I haven't lost my mental powers. I'm fine. It was all just a mental test. It was your graduation exam to see if you could fight on your own." Suppose they'd died? Moreover, what gives him the right to go out and enroll five young people ..

SANDERSON: Children

CLAREMONT: Children, not even adults, in his school, under false pretenses, because the parents don't know anything about what's going on. They knew it was a school for gifted youngsters, but they didn't know about the X-Men. Xavier brought them in, gave them their costumes, and from there on in they were up against foes who had the capacity and the will to kill them.

SANDERSON: Not to mention practicing every day in the Danger Room, which we are told could kill them

CLAREMONT: Exactly. What gives him the right to do that, and what gives him the right to do it without telling the parents? Suppose one of them had been killed? What does he tell Dr. and Mrs. Grey, if their daughter is killed?

SANDERSON: And indeed, it happened. Eventually.

CLAREMONT: Time and time again he would put them in situations where they had no choice. It was do or die. The most crucial aspect of cruelty, again in hindsight, because at the time it probably seemed like a great story, involved the "death" and return of Professor X. Why didn't Xavier simply say, "Excuse me, guys, I've got to go into the basement for two years to prepare to fight this extraterrestrial invader who's coming, so you're going to have to get along without me"? I mean, the kids thought he'd died, and it was as though they'd lost a parent. Not only that, Jean knew and was not allowed to tell the others! I mean, of all the vicious, unthinking, uncaring things to do to his kids. He had to go through this entire charade. The same thing holds true for the new X-Men. He went out and corralled another seven X-Men, a little older, though, if you follow Len's theory, they're all teen agers—and again, he doesn't tell the parents anything about what he's planning to do with the kids.

SANDERSON: And Kitty is younger than any he's



Marvel Girl shows her courage in a solo stand against Magneto, who surprisingly indicates a desire to make her his consort [X-Men #63: Thomas-Adams-Palmer]

picked before

CLAREMONT: That I have to take exclusive blame for, but it comes out of the same rationale. But suppose she's crippled? What does he tell her parents? Suppose she's killed? It happened to Phoenix. Remember, this is an ongoing process; if another mutant pops up, Xavier'll probably draft them too—and this will become a bone of contention between Scott and Xavier, in that Scott is now very aware of the fact that they can die and is very conscious of his responsibility to Kitty, to keep her alive. To give her a chance. Even if she is part of the X-Men by her own choice, does she have the right to make that choice at age 13? Does Xavier have the right to end her life, or to put her life at hazard before it's even begun? Xavier himself must bear a degree of responsibility [for Phoenix's death]. If he had never taken Jean into the X-Men the universe might have died, but it might not have, and Jean might not have died.

SANDERSON: Or if he had been there when she was having trouble.

CLAREMONT: Yes. To me his character has a degree of cold dispassionate ruthlessness that is the equal of any super-villain.

SANDERSON: How do you think he got that way?

Do you suppose it's because of the break-up with Moira? Is it because he tried to be a super hero in a sense himself and Lucifer stopped him by crippling him [20]?

CLAREMONT: I don't know. It's a process of evolution, perhaps. I don't know. It's something to think about. There are two questions: one, how much time passed between [his meetings with] Farouk and Lucifer, and two, how much between Lucifer and the [formation of] the X-Men. Obviously, there's enough time for him and Moira to have had a reconciliation, simply regarding working together again.

SANDERSON: But it's not the same

CLAREMONT: No, of course it's not the same.

SANDERSON: And in one "X-Men origin" story [38] Xavier says he's been just a hermit in his mansion ever since the Lucifer incident

CLAREMONT: Quite possibly. Could it be that something happened to him while he was buried under that deadfall? How the hell did he ever get out from under it? His legs were crushed. Why didn't he have them cut off? Why didn't the doctor amputate them at first sight?

SANDERSON: Plus the idea that here's somebody, who's learned that his mental powers are seemingly unbounded—and all of a sudden he can't walk—he's been paralyzed physically

CLAREMONT: Could be self defense. If to keep alive he had to heighten his own telepathic abilities the way Jean did in the shuttle, being around people could cause him physical pain. He may have realized his mistake in going after Lucifer was that he was too emotional, and he may have spent the next ten years doing yoga, learning to control totally every facet of his mind and being

SANDERSON: Or after Moira married someone else, he decided not to be so open emotionally toward other people

CLAREMONT: Sure. He was hurt. It may be that the thing that gave him the margin of victory over Dark Phoenix was not that he was much stronger than her *per se*, but that his mind, his power was under control. It was focused, he was experienced in its use, and that's what he spent the time learning, but the cost was a degree of human warmth and camaraderie.

SANDERSON: Now, Lilandra's appearance has begun to change that.

CLAREMONT: Of course. They're physically linked; they're bound

SANDERSON: Nevertheless, he's again lost her because he has decided he has to stay on Earth

CLAREMONT: Not lost her. They're being drawn apart by their jobs, but they'll come back together again. Love can endure a separation. It is not an end-

ing, it's a pause. There's a difference. He may be lonely, but that's why she left a starship near Earth. "If you ever want to come see me, whistle and say, 'Hey, ship, come pick me up, send me to Lilandra.'" Then he says, "Well, why don't you visit me?" "Well, I've got an empire to run." "I've got a school to run." "Really?" They're adults trying to work out their lives sensibly

SANDERSON: How could you characterize Cyclops?

CLAREMONT: My basic characterization for him is a young Henry Fonda, the Henry Fonda of the 1930s. Very tall, loose-limbed, relaxed, beginning to get a sense of humor, albeit a kind of black humor ..

SANDERSON: He's not that relaxed

CLAREMONT: I don't mean laid back. I mean relaxed in the sense that he's not always tense. But, he's learning how to do that now. Again, that's what Lee's there for, to get him to unwind a little. He's Midwestern—there's Oklahoma, Nebraska in there—he's introverted, shy, reserved, a brilliant strategist, a brilliant pilot, who's only just now beginning to understand what makes his head tick, and understand the people around him. In a sense, that understanding will make him a better leader, because he'll now be able to work with people instead of imposing his will on them, which is what he's been doing in the past

SANDERSON: Brought up to act as a drill sergeant by Xavier

CLAREMONT: Yes. He came out of a very restricted and restrictive environment in the orphanage. He never had a friend. Presumably, things happened to him in the orphanage which he would not like to remember. After he left, the eyebeams set him apart. To my way of thinking, his vision has to be really weird. I wonder if he's color-blind. Does he see everything in shades of red, because of the glasses, if for no other reason? Or does his mind automatically apply color values, like a computer, based on what it remembers from childhood? I don't know. John and I have discussed that. He disagreed; he thought Scott saw normally. I don't think so, I don't think he sees as we understand it. How can he? This, too, sets him apart. He can never, ever take his glasses off.

SANDERSON: Even when he sleeps, he must wear some sort of band made out of ruby quartz. He has to wear glasses in the shower

CLAREMONT: He has to wear them everywhere. Or go blind. Shut his eyes. And that's a horrible thing. Especially if you consider that the eyes are supposed to be the windows to the soul. His soul is shuttered, and that to an extent, exemplifies his characterization—shuttered. He's just now beginning to open the doors.

SANDERSON: What about the Beast?

CLAREMONT: Which one? There's Hank McCoy, the wordsmith, genius, who talked like one, the happy



Adams and Palmer's Jean and Lorna. [X-Men #60]



After Jean's apparent demise in #113, Scott finds himself unable to feel anything about her. Here, after his reunion with her, he explains what had happened to him. [X-Men #129: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

go-lucky strongman with the mind of an Einstein. Then there's the happy go lucky strongman with the mind of an Einstein who spent six months chewing peyote and getting stoned before showing up for the Avengers audition looking like Edward G. Robinson.

SANDERSON: Then there's the wiseacre

CLAREMONT: Then there's the lush. The thing that I don't understand is that in *The Avengers* he's always portrayed as going out with Wonder Man and drinking Thunderbird and Gallo wine. To me, the Beast is the most articulate, the most intelligent, the most sensitive, probably the most artistic (in awareness if not in ability) of the original X-Men. The Beast that I read for 65 issues of the original X-Men would not have said the things to Ms. Marvel that he said in *Avengers* #199. The Beast would have been the first one to understand. The Beast would have been the first one to hold out a hand to help. The Beast would have cared.

SANDERSON: Possibly he's been playing the role of jokester for so long that it's gotten in the way?

CLAREMONT: No. I feel that the fundamental problem is that the scene was written by someone who had little or no awareness of the previous Beast. David Michelinie has said in a number of interviews that his concept of research is to read the previous writer's run of the book that he's working on. In *The Avengers* case, that meant reading Jim Shooter's issues. Well,

the problem is that he saw only one facet of Ms. Marvel and one facet of the Beast. He was unaware, for example, that Ms. Marvel has a family who might be concerned by her sudden disappearance. He's unaware that as exemplified in Englehart's issues and typified in the original X-Men most of all, the Beast is a genius and that he is a sensitive, artistic soul. Jim didn't emphasize those qualities in his *Avengers* stories and hence David didn't either. So, what occurred was a steadily narrowed set of parameters. To me, Hank is the witziest, smartest, tenderest, gentlest of the X-Men and there in lies a marvelous characterizational dichotomy: he has big, monstrous hands, feet, mouth, and fur, yet he's kind and gentle. The problem with him is that he's a lot like Nightcrawler. [As I mentioned earlier], Englehart and I had the same idea at the same time. We were both tired of the tormented, demonic character.

SANDERSON: So you got two characters who have decided to accept their appearance.

CLAREMONT: They're both blue, furry, and acrobatic.

SANDERSON: And ladies' men, and wits

CLAREMONT: And swashbucklers

SANDERSON: And lovers of old movies

CLAREMONT: The scene I would like to see has the Beast, Nightcrawler, and Wolverine sitting on a

counter. The Beast is looking at Nightcrawler, who's blue and furry and has fangs, and looking at Wolverine who has the same haircut. He's a bit outraged, while the two X-Men are all grins.

SANDERSON: What about the Angel and Iceman?

CLAREMONT: Iceman I see as basically a normal guy. A college student, not terribly brilliant, not terribly stupid. An ordinary person, as close to being a normal person as an X-Men can be, with normal goals, for which his being an Iceman [is irrelevant]. I mean, it's fun, but what are you going to do for a living, as my grandfather always said to me about writing.

SANDERSON: I suppose that might change if he's going into the Avengers.

CLAREMONT: I suppose. As far as the Angel and Iceman are concerned, everything's up in the air — if you'll pardon the pun. Hopefully, they'll be more successful in *The Avengers* than they were in *The Champions*.

SANDERSON: Well, Angel began changing a bit from the start of the Hulk Annual that Roger [Stern] and John [Byrne] did.

CLAREMONT: Well, the problem with the Angel, as we discovered after we put him back in *The X-Men*, is that he's functionally redundant. The only thing he can really do is carry people around. He flies and he hits people, but considering the quality of the foes the X-Men run up against, that really doesn't give him much opportunity to do things. I can't see as it would in the Avengers, either.

SANDERSON: How about in terms of personality? Seems very much to be "I'm-a-rich-hedonist-and-I love it."

CLAREMONT: He's a Golden Boy. He never had to exert himself a day in his life for anything. He is so talented, and so smart, and so good looking and so charming and so rich that it all just [snaps fingers].

SANDERSON: Then let's get on to the other original member Jean. There is some criticism, as you are probably aware, that Jean could not have evolved from the character she was in the early issues to the character that she became in your issues. Do you feel that becoming the Phoenix created that radical change in her personality or do you think she was becoming more independent and attractive before you made her Phoenix?

CLAREMONT: First, Dave and I deliberately set out to make her more independent and attractive before we made her into Phoenix. I saw no reason why a young, intelligent, attractive, courageous, heroic young woman should look like a Republican frump. I told Dave, "Let's jazz her up," — visually jazz her up, changing her hairstyle, giving her slightly flashier clothes — and when he became more attracted to her,



The reunion of Sean Cassidy, the Banshee, with his long lost daughter, Theresa Rourke, also known as Stryx, another mutant with sonic powers. [X-Men #148 Claremont-Cockrum Rubinstein]

he liked drawing her and we liked using her again. I told Dave to jazz up the visuals on her power, because dotted lines do not an interesting visual make. I told him to do something with her along the lines of what Neal did with the Sentinels story — big effects — which we did in #98, against the Sentinels. And partly because there was all this talk about Ms. Marvel, we felt some pressure to get rid of the Marvel Girl name...

SANDERSON: Not to mention the fact that her name was "Girl."

CLAREMONT: Yes, that always bothered me. And neither of us really liked the costume, which was a bit dated.

SANDERSON: Late '60s miniskirt.

CLAREMONT: The problem with the miniskirt costume, as [Jim] Mooney found out with Supergirl, and as [Dick] Giordano found out when he drew Wonder Woman in skirts, is that you have to be very careful about the angles, or accept the fact that you're going to be able to see the woman's crotch. Now if you assume that it's a skating skirt and it's one piece, that's no problem, though it does tend to get a little awkward. But the other thing that I personally always had trouble accepting with Ms. Marvel's original costume as well is that if I'm going to go into a fight, I'm going to wear a costume that's going to cover every harmable square inch of my body. There's no other reason for wearing a costume, unless you're invulnerable and it doesn't matter, in which case you can wear anything you damn well please.



Moses Magnum, who battled the X-Men in Japan in #119. Claremont (Byrne-Austin)

SANDERSON: How much protection does cloth give, though?

CLAREMONT: One assumes that these costumes have inherent abilities which protect as well as cover. My assumption always was that—as I pointed out in the movie scenario I did—the Black Widow's costume is an extremely thin, flexible body armor that is capable of stopping a .38 slug cold at point-blank range, and of minimizing or lessening the damage that a .45 or a .44 or a .357 Magnum could do.

SANDERSON: What would it be made of, then?

CLAREMONT: I don't know. Some neat Japanese material who knows?—an extremely fine metal ceramic mesh. I don't know. That's irrelevant. But it serves some function other than being a sprayed-on piece of cloth. It's insulated, possibly. I figure the superhero costumes serve that function. What Dave and I tried to do with Ms. Marvel was to create a costume that covered as much of her as possible—her knees, her legs, her torso, her elbows—although she was partially invulnerable, the need for covering was not as extreme as with other characters. A miniskirt costume didn't really do that. And also, I didn't see why a miniskirt was sexy and a full body costume wasn't, when the essential way an artist does a full body costume is that they do a nude figure and then add lines. So it didn't seem to me there was any real difference. So Dave and I sat down and he drew about two hundred sketches and we evolved the Phoenix costume. We wanted something that was a new Jean, and Phoenix was it. We had originally envisioned that she had a power level that was equivalent to Storm's, and that the saving of the Universe was a one-time only stunt, that it was Jean achieving her full potential for that one moment...

SANDERSON: Possibly because she was in the M'krann Crystal at the time

CLAREMONT: Yes. And she was drawing on the other X-Men for help. The ramifications were something we didn't really consider when we started it. But I don't see [our changes] of her as a violation [of her characterization in past issues]. Jean was always a very vibrant, lively character. She was courageous witness her first fight with Magneto in the Savage Land [#63]. She was sexy witness that Danger Room sequence with Lorna Dane in the first Sauron story. Neal drew those two fantastic head shots [#60]. She evolved into a somewhat more flashy woman than she was, but the key words there are "woman" and "evolved." So I don't see

it as a violation of her original character. I see it as a growth of her original character.

SANDERSON: Could you explain the references to the Kaballah when Jean saves the Universe at the end of #108?

CLAREMONT: Well, the reference to the Kaballah was that my wife Bonnie and a friend John Warner and I discovered after we'd been building the X-Men toward this climax in #108, that the eight X-Men all had aspects that related to the tree of life, the Kaballah, the seraphim, the divine angels of Jewish mythology, and Jean specifically related to Tipherath, who is the core, the centerpiece. Colossus was the base and Xavier was the crown, and each X-Man related in very specific ways—I've got it written down somewhere—and Jean was the catalyst that held it all together, the centerpiece that gave it all meaning. I wanted to expand on the idea that the X-Men have a function in life, in the scheme of things, greater than themselves. The whole of the X-Men is far greater than the sum of its eight parts. This was all supposed to relate to the conflict between the sephiroth and the clipeth, the bright side and the dark side, good and evil, and her salvation was supposed to come out of it. Jim [Shooter] didn't understand that so he had us take it out in #136, which actually made for a more effective ending. There was a lot of talk. There were a lot of captions in the sequence where the Phoenix effect is getting bigger and bigger and actually it works much better with just a couple of lines here and there, but it kind of rendered the first reference back in #108 [irrelevant] and not terribly sensible. I may go back to it; I don't know.

SANDERSON: So, after the saving of the universe, she was meant to be stuck at Storm's level of power.

CLAREMONT: One of the storylines that Dave and I discussed was the possibility of turning her into a power junkie: the idea was that the more power she used, the



Banshee lost his sonic powers after overextending them in blocking Moses Magnum's attempt to create an earthquake to sink Japan. [X-Men #119: Claremont-Byrne Austin]

more she wanted; the more she wanted, the more she got, the more she got the more out of control it got. And she was scared, because she didn't think she was ready for it, so she would deliberately not use her power, and then we'd deliberately put the X-Men in situations where they had to use her power. I wanted to give Jean an internal conflict, through which she could constantly demonstrate her heroic nature by overcoming it.

SANDERSON: If you hadn't had to do the Dark Phoenix storyline, would she have stayed at the level of power she exhibited in the Magneto story, [#112]?

CLAREMONT: I don't know. I really don't. Because much of it is an outgrowth of how John felt and how John and I interacted and how John and Roger interacted, because that was part of it too. I felt Roger had a strong bias toward John's opinions on the book. Whereas Dave and I were more of one mind about what we wanted to do with Phoenix. It's impossible to say what would have happened if Dave hadn't left the book.

SANDERSON: For the record, do you see any possibility of Jean ever returning from the dead again?

CLAREMONT: Anything is possible.

SANDERSON: How about Banshee? Banshee is a person with many different things in his background: Interpol agent, former slave of Factor Three, lover of James Joyce and American country music, a person with a nasty brother, and heir to a castle...

CLAREMONT: Lover of Moira MacTaggart, father of Stryx.

SANDERSON: There's a lot to him. How do you see him? You seem to downplay the Interpol and country music elements.

CLAREMONT: I don't have a chance to show the country music element, unfortunately.

SANDERSON: Why would he become an adventurer or an Interpol agent when he was heir to this castle?

CLAREMONT: For that very reason. He's an adventurer; he's a rogue.

SANDERSON: In fact, you often have him say he spent his whole life courting death just for its own sake.

CLAREMONT: Yes. He's a Robert E. Howard character, but with a sense of humor. He's born out of time. He should have been Captain Blood, and Black Tom should have been Levasseur, the Basil Rathbone character...

SANDERSON: Although Banshee seems to be feeling that he's gotten too old to be Captain Blood any longer.

CLAREMONT: He's in his 40s.

SANDERSON: He even said before he lost his power, "Maybe I'm getting too old for this."

CLAREMONT: What I wanted to show was the transition out of being a super hero: what happens when a super-hero hits 40, what happens when the physical instrument happens to be not quite as effective as it once was. What happens when you start thinking



Scott Summers's brother Alex, alias Havok (X-Men #58, Thomas-Adams Palmer)

about, "What if I had a wife and a family, and a home?" In a sense Banshee is the person Xavier would like to be to the X-Men—a friend, as opposed to the mentor, the father figure. He's mature, he knows who he is, he knows what he is, he's a very straightforward person because he's gone through the valley, he's been down to the pit and up again in his life, and in a sense he's found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, he's found Moira.

SANDERSON: Will he be staying with her on Muir Isle?

CLAREMONT: They can commute. The point is that he is at a stage in his life now where the rewards of being a swashbuckler and being a hero are not commensurate with the sacrifice that is home and family. I mean, even Captain Blood settled down and married Arabella Bishop at the end of the story. It's a stage that all the super-heroes will have to go through eventually.

It's a stage that Dave and I planned that Scott and Jean would go through. We wanted to try with them to see if we could violate the old dictum that as soon as characters are married the interest goes out of their life. John would point to Rhoda as an example of that—it was an interesting series until she married Joe and then it went down the tubes. It depends on how you treat it, I think. Why should Reed and Sue be one of the two marriages in the Marvel Universe and the only one with

kids? My grand plan was that Scott and Jean would get married in the 1981 Annual and for the 20th anniversary issue in '83, they would have a child, and Scott would have to deal with the fact that his job is to lead the X-Men and he wants to raise the kid and Jean would be dealing with the fact that she loves this child but she loves working, fighting by Scott's side. So Mariko, perhaps, ends up taking care of the child, or Kitty—and Kitty would get pissed, because she doesn't want to be a babysitter all her life. I wanted to show the evolution, the ages of man, so to speak.

SANDERSON: Prince Valiant's been married for 30 years, and he's got four kids.

CLAREMONT: Yeah. And his son [Prince Arn] has been going off and having adventures now. I mean, just because it's never been done right doesn't mean it can't be done. Now, I don't know if I could do it right, but it would be worth a try.

SANDERSON: What do you think of the criticism that Banshee is presented as an Irish stereotype?

CLAREMONT: [pause] Quite possibly, because comics deal in stereotypes.

SANDERSON: Should it? Isn't it a challenge to a writer to take a stereotyped character and give him dimensions beyond stereotypes?

CLAREMONT: Well, that's what I was trying to do with the Joyce [#123].

SANDERSON: With *Banshee* reading *Finnegans Wake*, an Irish book, but not by someone who was thought all that highly of in Ireland.

CLAREMONT: I chose *Finnegans Wake* not because it was an Irish book but because it was a book that anybody with half a literary mind would realize that only an insane person or an extremely erudite, educated, articulate one would even attempt to read. I'm only on page three.

SANDERSON: That's where I am.

CLAREMONT: I consider myself proud to have gotten that far, and this in ten years. *Ulysses* was hard enough. But when you say "stereotypical," part of the problem is, how do you tell the reader this guy is Irish? Well, give him an accent. Jim [Shooter] doesn't like phonetic accents. You have to pick a word here or there or an expression or an attitude or a phrase.

SANDERSON: And Banshee happens to be a sort of friendly, easy-going character.

CLAREMONT: Yes. It may be cliché to show him when he's in civvies wearing a cord sweater and corduroys and a jockey's hat, but in Ireland—especially in the country—that's the "uniform"! That's what you wear. An Aran sweater, and cords, and boots, and that peaked hat.

SANDERSON: And it is true that when one says "Irish stereotype," one usually thinks of the negative stereo-



Colossus's homesickness [X-Men #119: Claremont-Byrne-Alstin]

types, and Banshee is certainly not a drunkard or overly sentimental, either.

CLAREMONT: He's a normal person. Unfortunately, one of the drawbacks of the book is that it's too crowded. There are too many characters, too many good characters, and I've never had the space I wanted or felt I needed to give them all the moments they deserve. And sometimes I plot moments into a story and they've been shunted aside for various reasons. For example, the reunion of Scott and Jean in #126 after they've been apart for months and months and months—well, in the original plot, the reaction to that meeting was supposed to take place in #126.

SANDERSON: It wasn't supposed to be just that sort of 'joke' about Jean thinking Scott was Wyngarde?

CLAREMONT: No, there was supposed to be a scene bridging that and the briefing, in which they have that awkward "I thought you were dead" moment.

SANDERSON: And then perhaps not coming fully to terms with each other until the flight home [#129]?

CLAREMONT: No, it was supposed to happen there. But John felt he didn't have space, and there wasn't really an opportunity to do it in the next two issues of the Proteus saga, because everybody was going boompetyboompetyboom, lickety-split to the end. So we had to postpone it to #129. It was a structural decision for which we must both take the blame, but that's unfortunately how things work sometimes. To have added the scene would have meant adding a whole new page to the book and cutting a page somewhere else, or repencilling the last 15 pages, or nine pages, or 11 pages, and that's beyond the bounds of sense.

But the other thing that always bothered me about Banshee was that I was never able to exploit his powers

to the fullest extent, in the same way I did with Siryn. All he could do was scream, and the scream would burn through things or cut through things, and he could stun people, and he could fly, and that was it. I was thinking, first of all, you could use the sound as a hypnotic agent, you could use the sound to affect the chemical balance of the brain, you could use ultra-low frequency sound for disintegration or stunning. You could create sonic holograms, or use ultra-high frequency to transmit messages. The potential is limitless, but because Banshee is an established character with established powers, to change any of that would have given him "new powers," and that was considered verboten. So my way around it is to take them all away, and my plan is then, through Siryn we give him back his powers—the rough idea I have now is that she uses her own abilities to knit his vocal chords back together by sonic surgery. He will then have these enhanced abilities that his daughter has.

SANDERSON: That's very strange, because, for example, you look at the history of the Flash, and in every issue they're finding a new way to use his powers. So just having the same uses for the powers every time hardly has much precedent.

CLAREMONT: This relates to editorial attitudes, which unfortunately change with editors.

SANDERSON: When Banshee gets his powers back, will he be featured in the group regularly? Or Siryn?

CLAREMONT: Siryn will stay in Ireland. What I plan to do is have a core group of X-Men and then have a number of characters on the periphery: Polaris, Banshee, Beast, etc., who can come in. It will be a Mission Impossible format, as the story requires, we will use what members we need, and run it like that.

ACHMED EL-GIBAR WAS THE SELF-STYLED MASTER THIEF OF CAIRO WHEN SOME OF HIS URGHINS FOUND HER IN A BACK-ALLEY A FEW WEEKS AFTER HER PARENTS HAD BEEN KILLED.*



Storm's childhood teacher Achmed El-Gibar. [X-Men #113: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

SANDERSON: Havoc and Polaris, who are still in their 20s, have come to the decision Banshee has come to.

CLAREMONT: That's to contrast with Scott. Scott's the X Man. Havoc didn't [become a super hero] until he was out of college, and then he discovered he had this ability. It was a conscious, rational decision. I did not want the two of them duplicating each other. And why, simply because you have super-abilities, is there an imperative that you use them for the defense of humanity? The argument from Havoc's point of view is that having super-powers is like having diabetes or high blood pressure: it's something you learn to live with, but you don't necessarily let it dominate your life. And as far as Lorna's concerned, the most important thing in her life is Aex, which is a very traditional attitude for her to take. But it's her choice, you see.

SANDERSON: She's another one who didn't discover her powers until relatively late. For most of her life she just thought she had this strange green hair she had to hide from everybody.

CLAREMONT: Again, the point with them is to create a contrast. Something I wanted to do with Ms. Marvel when she was an Avenger was to have a scene in Ms. Marvel in which they call her up and say, "Avengers Assemble," and she replies, "I can't, I've got a

deadline. You'll have to go without me. I've got to get this story in by Wednesday or I can't pay the rent." [Some super heroes are] people who work for a living, who have other responsibilities than saving the universe, from which we can get all sorts of interesting conflicts. Suppose Alex and Lorna have a kid. His Uncle Scotty...

SANDERSON: Wishes he had one too, maybe.

CLAREMONT: Of course. The idea is to create as many possibilities as possible, as many alternate structural pathways as one can. Granted some readers find it very upsetting that there are so many subplots outstanding, and they get confused and forget them after a while. But the other side of it is, we never run out. There's always something to pique someone's interest.

SANDERSON: We've already talked about Nightcrawler's learning to accept what he is. Are you entirely happy with the Team-Up story about his days in the circus?

CLAREMONT: No.

SANDERSON: The idea was that he was accepted in the circus, but when this Texas millionaire for some reason decided to buy a small circus in Germany...

CLAREMONT: Oh, no. This is the way it works. [The sorceress who adopted Nightcrawler] Margal is part of this circus. She's the gypsy fortuneteller, and no one realizes, of course, that she's more than that. Nightcrawler is part of her family, and has worked himself up to being a flyer, one of the top flyers they've got. The audience assumes his appearance is an elaborate costume, and the people in the circus don't care. Jardine owns the Marvel equivalent of Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey. He comes to Europe, decides to buy the German circus and to bring it over to New York and merge it with his show. He's not interested in Nightcrawler as a flyer: he wants him to be a freak. Nightcrawler says, "Screw you." At the same time, Margal's son—his adoptive brother Stefan—is going insane for various demonic reasons which we'll not go into at this time. He goes down to Winzeldorf, kills himself a few young girls—messily. Nightcrawler goes after him, they fight, and he kills Stefan during the fight. On his way back to the circus he gets stopped by the good citizens of Winzeldorf, who are looking for the murderer of the young girls, and what better suspect than this blue furry stranger with fangs and funny hands and a tail. He runs for his life, Xavier finds him, and the rest is history.

SANDERSON: You've said that Nightcrawler is the most traditionally religious member of the current group. And even visiting an illusionary hell [X-Men Annual #4] didn't seem to shake his faith, though the death of Phoenix did, at least momentarily. [X-Men #139]

CLAREMONT: It did so because he believed in his



Wolverine presents Mariko with a gift. [X-Men #120 © Claremont Byrne-Austin]

heart of hearts that it was unfair, that there should have been a third way. This is John's argument about the FF. If Person A is about to kill a planet and Reed must either kill Person A or Planet B will die, Reed will find a third way, and that was my feeling. We should have found a third way. The circumstances prevented it. That was my using Nightcrawler to say we should have found a third way.

SANDERSON: Do you think that Nightcrawler's out cry against God in that issue is going to develop into something more?

CLAREMONT: It might.

SANDERSON: Then there's Colossus. You've described him as sort of a natural poet who can't quite find the words to express his feelings.

CLAREMONT: He lacks the instrument. He has the feelings, he cannot express them. He doesn't know how. He doesn't have the verbal facility.

SANDERSON: Although he comes close, in a way. In #109 he does manage to come up with some evocative images.

CLAREMONT: True, but he does so unconsciously. He couldn't sit down and try to write a poem. He's not yet Yuri Zhivago. He has the soul of a Yuri Zhivago, but he doesn't know how to get it out.

SANDERSON: He seems in many ways to be the most childlike, in a positive sense. Is this perhaps why he and Kitty may eventually get married?

CLAREMONT: No. He is the most straight on of the X-Men. To him, things either are or are not. But he operates and exists on a much gentler wavelength than Wolverine. He is a creature of the land. He's a farmer. He relates to things from an eternal perspective, that the land was here before us, and it will be here after us.

The "laid-back" aspect of his nature comes from the fact that winter is followed by spring, there is a continual cycle of death and rebirth. Everything has a place. If Thunderbird had lived, he and Colossus would have been much alike, or at least a traditional Indian and Colossus would be much alike in their reverence for the land, in their belief in the interaction of all things. He is fundamental, but that doesn't mean he's stupid. He's basic, but basic in the sense that he is in tune with certain elemental, fundamental truths of existence. He is not a sophisticated person. He would not fit in well with the jet set sophisticated elite.

SANDERSON: He's very attached to his family.

CLAREMONT: That's a Russian trait.

SANDERSON: And he has these pangs of homesickness every so often.

CLAREMONT: No one else has a family.

SANDERSON: He sees the other X-Men very much as a family, perhaps more so than the others.

CLAREMONT: What we will be showing eventually is that Colossus has discovered too late—and to his despair—that he can't go home. The Peter Rasputin that existed in 1975 or whenever the group was created, no longer exists. It's exemplified by the scene in which he's sitting there in his bedroom in #109 trying to write his parents and saying, "I'm sorry I haven't written you but we've been out saving the universe."

SANDERSON: Then there's the way that his discoveries of near-absolute evil such as Proteus seem to shake him so.

CLAREMONT: He can't conceive of anyone doing such harm to a living being. Even Storm has more sophistication than that, because of her youth as a thief. But Colossus has grown up on a farm. For want

of a better term, he's a peasant. But like all peasants he is in tune with certain things that a more sophisticated person might not be. By the same token he has seen things and done things and experienced things that only a half dozen people in the world can understand, and those are his fellow X-Men. He's been to the M'krann crystal, he's been beyond known space [#107-108] he has been to hell [Annual #4], he has been to Arkon's world and he's going back again [Annals #3, 5]

SANDERSON: *He's been in outer space, to the moon* [#137]

CLAREMONT: He has looked into the face of a being that is as close to God as any human is likely to get: Jean. One cannot do all this, experience all this, see all this, and not be changed. He is changing, he's growing up. The Peter who existed in the future [#141-142] has maintained that center. He's the most centered of the group, and the least psychologically screwed up. That doesn't mean there are no depths to him, but they are very primal depths.

SANDERSON: *Why are he and Kitty possibly going to get together and fall in love? They have in one alternate future.*

CLAREMONT: Why not?

SANDERSON: *Weil, I was just wondering whether there was anything in particular that draws them to each other.*

CLAREMONT: I think John liked the idea. And of the ones that survived, they seemed the right couple. I wanted a scene in the future where the ramifications of what was being done could be discussed, the cost of what was being done, and I kind of felt that a husband and wife should do it, and it just kind of naturally grew out of the storylines that Kitty and Peter were meant for each other. And possibly still are.

SANDERSON: *How about Storm?*

CLAREMONT: How about Storm?

SANDERSON: *You were the one who decided to have her spend her earliest childhood in New York.*

CLAREMONT: To my regret.

SANDERSON: *Why is that?*

CLAREMONT: Partly because it was unnecessary. Her father could have been an American, but he should have been assigned to Nairobi. He should have been born in Africa, not New York. It seemed like a good idea at the time because I wanted to make her less alien, in retrospect I think it was probably a mistake.

SANDERSON: *Was she born in this country?*

CLAREMONT: The first time you see her, she's six months old and they're leaving a Harlem tenement, though I am sure I could probably change it.

SANDERSON: *In any event, she has no real memories.*

CLAREMONT: Oh, no, she was aware of everything from the day she was born. We don't know what was lost because of the bombing attack, but the possibility exists that she remembers everything. She knows where she used to live. She went home and visited it.

SANDERSON: *That's right. She remembers who her parents were. Right down to her last name. She was able to find their home. So she's brought up by a thief in Cairo...*

CLAREMONT: A Fagin character, yes...

SANDERSON: *How is it then that one often thinks of her as one of the most idealistic of the X-Men? How is it that she developed her strong moral sense?*

CLAREMONT: Just because Achmed el-Jibar was a Fagin character doesn't mean he was a swine. If you remember in *Citizen of the Galaxy*, Thorby Baslim spends most of his youth as a beggar, but the Colonel teaches him a moral code to live by.

SANDERSON: *So that her mentor may have taught her how to pick pockets, but he was also teaching her loyalty, devotion, and even courage?*

CLAREMONT: Sure. It's not beyond the bounds of possibility. And the fact that she walked from Cairo to Kenya which is almost 3,000 miles alone at age 12, you have the concept of a rite of passage.

SANDERSON: *Why did she do that?*

CLAREMONT: She had no choice.

SANDERSON: *Why could she not have stayed, if not in Cairo, somewhere in the Middle East?*

CLAREMONT: Because she was being summoned back to the land of her ancestors. Something within her was responding. It says so in #102. She was responding to a call. The call drew her south, to a valley in Kenya, Tanzania, wherever...

SANDERSON: *Where she became a goddess.*

CLAREMONT: Yes.

SANDERSON: *I expect that even though she was brought up by a thief, she would not have learned responsibility toward society from him.*

CLAREMONT: There are a lot of gaps in Storm's past.

SANDERSON: *Did she learn it when she was acting as goddess for this tribe?*

CLAREMONT: I don't want to say.

SANDERSON: *Do you want to say anything about what it was that called her back to the land of her ancestors?*

CLAREMONT: This is something that will be expanded on in the Lady Daemon/X-Men story that Michael Golden and I are planning. The idea is that Storm's mother comes from a line of, for want of a better term, witch-women that to a very real extent can be traced back to the dawn of humanity. They have been in this part of Africa since the beginning of humanity. There is



A sudden thunderclap of violence: Wolverine on the attack. [X-Men #133: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

Wolverine rebels against his psychosis. [X-Men #147: Claremont-Cockrum-Rubinstein]



a lot more to Storm than just the ability to create winds. There's a sensitivity, a power, and this is not to say that she has magical abilities, but she is heir to a tradition, to a lineage that is incredibly old and incredibly in tune with life. As I think I was saying before, when she calls herself a goddess, it is not total hyperbole. In that sense, perhaps her power does merge with her heritage in that she functions in tune with the planet itself, that when she utilizes her powers to the fullest extent she merges with the Earth, with the Earth's spirit. It also goes back to her pledge never to take a life.

SANDERSON: Being a goddess to this tribe was what gave her her sense of regality.

CLAREMONT: No, I think she always had that. That she inherited.

SANDERSON: It's just natural?

CLAREMONT: Mm-hm.

SANDERSON: Storm also has very much of a sense that the X-Men are a family. The family that she never had.

CLAREMONT: Yes.

SANDERSON: You have said before that you do not see her developing an actual love interest anytime soon.

CLAREMONT: The basic rationale, which both Dave and John agree with me on, is that there is no one really in the Marvel Universe who's good enough for her, who is her equal. She would not be taking a step down by falling in love with the Black Panther, perhaps... John and I toyed with the idea of having her get into a relationship with Scott or start to, but unfortunately I've really kind of done that with Mystique and Danny [Iron

Fist].

SANDERSON: I should expect another obstacle might also be Storm's particular viewpoint on life. As you say, she's pretty much in touch with nature, with the Earth. She knows what it's been to be a goddess to a tribe. It's hard to relate to that if you're a normal everyday person.

CLAREMONT: Well, I'm not saying that the potential does not exist, I'm saying that we have not yet found a character who is sufficient to awaken love in Storm. I would think that if Storm fell in love with anyone, it would not be a casual relationship and if it did not work out, it would cause her a great deal of harm. It would hurt. So part of my antipathy toward [her falling in love with] the Black Panther is that I don't have any control over him as a character, and I don't want Storm suddenly showing up in other books, waltzing out with the Black Panther...

SANDERSON: Or spending loads of time in Wakanda.

CLAREMONT: Precisely.

SANDERSON: How do you think Wolverine has changed since he joined the X-Men?

CLAREMONT: Oh God, a different day, a different character. In the beginning Len crafted him as a crazy man, and I took that and embellished on it, making him crazier. Problem was, I never really liked craziness, so Dave and I began making him more rational, and John and I continued the process.

SANDERSON: And made him less of a loner, developing friendships.

CLAREMONT: That was the whole point. It was a big thing, his saying in #113, "I never even told her my name" when he crumples up the photograph of Jean he picked up in Iron Fist #15. That was an example of his growing.

SANDERSON: Jean was the first person he said he ever cared for, presumably excepting the Hudsons.

CLAREMONT: There's a difference. Those were friends. This is in the sense of love. And also at that time the Hudsons didn't exist *per se*. In a sense we were kind of filling in backgrounds retroactively and dancing around precise nuances of phrase to establish things without being any more definite than we had to be. The problem was that for about a year John and I operated under the assumption that Shooter wanted Wolverine toned down, didn't want him to be a homicidal psychopath. Evidently, John went to a convention and Jim was appalled to hear John saying, "Yeah, Wolverine killed the guard in #116; yes, Wolverine's a crazy guy; yes, Wolverine will cut people to pieces without a second thought." Jim came back to the office and said we must either present Wolverine's victims alive and hale and repaired and unhurt, or

Wolverine must pay for his crimes, stand trial and be punished. So we began toning him down, making him more rational, the rationale for this being that Wolverine could not have loved Jean, could not have experienced #137 and not be changed. To stay the same, to stay savage to stay psychotic would be to deny his feelings for her and hers for him.

SANDERSON: Now, mind you, he said a couple of times he responded to what he saw as a certain degree of savagery and aggressiveness in Jean, but you're saying he saw more to her than that.

CLAREMONT: No, I was saying by the end just the example, the beauty of her existence, touched them all in ways they cannot begin to understand or only just begin to understand. And that Wolverine's response was to grow up.

SANDERSON: And of course in the first Alpha Flight story, he seemed to be greatly affected by the fact that they would all fight for him [#121].

CLAREMONT: And also that was when we first established that they were as good at misunderstanding him as he was at letting them misunderstand him. Then, after we set this process in motion, Jim [Shooter] came in and demanded to know why Wolverine was being turned into such a sissy. Evidently, what he wanted was for Wolverine to have the capacity to go crazy and kill but never be allowed to kill. He wanted Wolverine to be as much of a potential danger to the X-Men as to other people. So we turned right around and had Wolverine try and cut Nightcrawler's head off over Mariko, which made no sense whatsoever [#143]. As I see it, Wolverine's fundamental character is that he is trying desperately to maintain rational control over himself, but every so often, without wanting to, for no reason, he goes crazy. He goes berserk.

SANDERSON: When he sees someone he decides is an outright enemy out to kill him, then apparently not only doesn't he mind acting savagely toward him, but he even enjoys it.

CLAREMONT: He likes fighting. He enjoys scrapping. That we've established. The other thing we've established is that he's a soldier. He has no qualms whatsoever about taking a life. It's part of the job for him. But in #147, one of the key scenes is where Wolverine feels this berserker rage building within him and knows that if he gives in to the rage he will never get out of the trap he is in. So what he tries to do is keep a lid on it, take the passion, the indomitable adrenalin rush that it will give him, and control it, and he does.

SANDERSON: He says at one point in the Japan story that he doesn't like civilization because there are too many rules, too many people saying no, and adds that he would like to lash right out, no holds barred, in fighting, but people keep telling him not to [#118].



Kitty Pryde
[X-Men
#130: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

CLAREMONT: In terms of characterization, he's a lineal descendant of Conan. Wolverine and Conan would get along real well. Or they'd kill each other.

SANDERSON: But it again implies that when he really gets mad at somebody he does take a certain amount of pleasure in giving it to that person.

CLAREMONT: Sure. Again, if you want an analogue, Wolverine is a Cimmerian. Lock, stock, and barrel. If Conan and Wolverine met on the street they would be relating to each other like looking into a funhouse mirror at distorted images of themselves. Wolverine is out of place and out of time. He's a classic Howard character.

SANDERSON: What draws him to Mariko?

CLAREMONT: The gentleness. The beauty. The center, again.

SANDERSON: Something he sees lacking in himself?

CLAREMONT: Yes. She's unattainable. She represents a peace, a contentment, a beauty, a tranquility that he has striven for all his life.

SANDERSON: Just as when in #109 he tries to get up to the deer and touch it.

CLAREMONT: Yes. For him that's a technical exercise in stalking. As he says to Storm, it doesn't take any skill to blow a deer's head off, what takes skill is walking up beside it and saying, "How ya doin'?" and scaring the hell out of it.

SANDERSON: I was wondering whether that was also part of it, that aspect of beauty.

CLAREMONT: It is an aspect, yes. He won't be laid a hand on. He is surrounded by a very specific set of parameters, and if you abide by those parameters, stay within those parameters, you're fine. But if you cross the line, you have to be prepared to take the consequences, like a rude word, or a punch in the nose, or you can have your guts cut out. It depends on the gravity of the transgression.

SANDERSON: *With regards to Wolverine's origin, we've already had clues here and there. We know he's got an adamantium skeleton, we know that the Canadian doctors put it in...*

CLAREMONT: Do we?

SANDERSON: *Do we? All right, we don't. We know he's got an adamantium skeleton and he's...*

CLAREMONT: Well, let's put it this way. He's got a skeleton that as far as I'm concerned is an adamantium-coated synthesis. It's a hybrid. It's one molecule of adamantium bonded to a molecule of calcium. It's not a case of their taking his skeleton out and putting a replacement in. The net result may be bones that look very shiny and almost metallic, if you strip the skin off him or it may be that when the Sentinel blasted Wolverine [in the alternate future of #142] the calcium boiled away and all there was left was the adamantium. So his skeleton is not as strong as pure adamantium, but it is substantially stronger than damn near anything else.

SANDERSON: *Well, in any event, he was found in the woods and taken in by the Hudsons, he received an adamantium-calcium skeleton, he became a Canadian secret agent, and spent some time in Japan.*

CLAREMONT: Right.

SANDERSON: *Are we ever going to get a full origin story?*

CLAREMONT: Well, Dave has trouble with John's origin dealing with Wolverine being very old and having certain World War II...

SANDERSON: *And having Sabretooth as a father?*

CLAREMONT: No, that was always part of his origin. But whether we do anything with it is up in the air at this point. I really don't want to go into the origin, because I haven't figured it out.

SANDERSON: *About Kitty now: how would you compare Kitty to all the other child super heroes?*

CLAREMONT: I don't think there is any comparison. John created a 13-year-old mutant. I put her in Deerfield, Illinois. I said she had middle-class parents possibly getting a divorce, John contributed the visual on them, I threw in the dancing aspect of it and the genius aspect of it, and then for characterization I just looked at the 13-year-olds who live in my building, and Louise's 13-year-old daughter, Julie, and pooled all of their characterization and synthesized them for Kitty's. The idea was to make her a rounded person first and then worry about the super-hero aspect. The operative term was that she had to be plucky. She had to be the kind of girl who, in spite of being scared stiff, would go into the lion's den, who, when given a mission by Cyclops, would not fail. Otherwise, what's the point of putting her in the X-Men? And yet, considering all the brave things she did—sneaking into the hovercraft in

#129, sneaking into Storm's cage in #130, getting the message, calling for help—when Jean finds her in #131, she's huddled in a corner crying and shivering. Roger cut a line out of that which I was very sorry to see go. When Jean was hugging and comforting Kitty, Jean makes a reference to the fact that she's doing to Kitty what her older sister used to do to her, again trying to make the bridge between the two of them, and the reality of the readers. Roger, I guess, cut it out for space. I don't know why he cut it out. Unfortunately, for space reasons, for editorial reasons, a lot of what gets cut are the grace notes. The first things to go in a plot when it's turned into a pencil job are the grace notes, and the first things that get cut from the scripts are the grace notes—the things that point a scene, that add a little emphasis on the side so that there is less chance of misunderstanding, of ambiguity. And that's sad. It's part of the age-old conflict of the writer wanting his words vs. the artist who wants the pictures to have prominence.

SANDERSON: *Why do you think she's become so popular?*

CLAREMONT: I think she's the first modern realistic teen-ager that's been done [in super hero comics].

SANDERSON: *A teen-ager that young, that is.*

CLAREMONT: Yes. She reads like a person. There is no intentional condescension. Yes, she is a 13-year-old, but that doesn't mean she can be any less heroic or courageous or stupid or intelligent or foolish [than someone older]. Take a scene like the clean-up sequence in #144. In the previous issue she beat this demon that singlehandedly destroyed the house, and she did it all by herself. This is an incredibly brave and courageous and laudable thing she's done. She walks into the room and Wolverine and Nightcrawler react by saying, "O-o-o-o o-o ohh, it's the terrible tiny teen terror. We're going to dock your allowance for this kid. You should have it paid off in about two or three centuries." Like a kid she doesn't take it as a joke. She feels really ashamed.

SANDERSON: *Because she messed up the building?*

CLAREMONT: She caused forty-odd million dollars of damage! It's like, she is so sorry, so shy, so insecure. She's only been there for a few months and the first thing she does is wreck the place.

SANDERSON: *And she thinks professional super heroes aren't supposed to do this.*

CLAREMONT: Right. And she's a kid, so she reacts like a kid. She bursts into tears, and cries: "I wish it had killed me! Then you'd all be sorry!" Then she runs out, and of course the others feel like real shiteheels. Nightcrawler goes out to apologize. But that's the point: we can do things like that. Another part of the reason I like Kitty is that she provides such an extreme

contrast to the others. Finally we have a character in this group who is not 18 to 25 years old, who is not super sophisticated, who does not have a sprayed on costume, who is not sexually upfront if not active, and who is not secure. We have someone who is learning the ropes and who is making mistakes. Again, I think that what attracted the audience to Spider-Man was the fact that he screwed up all the time, the fact that you could read Spider-Man and think, "God! Even I could do a better job than that!" This is hopefully the same kind of thing. Kids read Kitty and they say, "Oh, hey, I could do better than that," or "Wow! Isn't she neat! Wouldn't I like to be like her?"

One doesn't get that sense from Robin. Robin was always a sidekick. **SANDERSON:** I always wanted to be Batman, not Robin.

CLAREMONT: The trick is, Kitty wants to be Storm, but people want to be Kitty. And Kitty being a kid with the guilelessness of a kid, sees Storm and relates to her as a mother figure and sees Stevie and relates to her as an alternate mother figure. Unfortunately, Storm gets jealous. All of a sudden there are undercurrents. And Kitty's at the age where the hormones are just beginning to kick into gear and she's just beginning to figure out who and what she is and what she wants and how she wants it. There's an infinite set of directions we can go with her, and with her in relation to the group.

SANDERSON: How was it decided to make her Marvel's first Jewish hero since the Golem?

CLAREMONT: Why not?

SANDERSON: That's a good enough reason.

CLAREMONT: No other ones. John thought it would be nice, and I agreed. He drew the Star of David and I went with it. She's his character, from start to finish.

SANDERSON: Where do the X-Men go from here? Not only in terms of the regular book but also in terms of the graphic novel and the prose novel.

CLAREMONT: Oh, the graphic novel deals quite specifically with the concept of prejudice. The villain is



The 13½-year-old Kitty is easily upset when Wolverine and Nightcrawler kid her about the damage created by her solo battle against the N'garai Demon. [X-Men #144: Claremont-Anderson-Rubinstein]

a person who is out to destroy them for no other reason than they exist, and Magneto's in it and Brent Anderson will be doing the art and it will be very good.

I don't know if there will be a prose novel. If there were a prose novel I would almost like to adapt the Phoenix story and tell it my way, as I wanted to tell it.

As far as the regular book itself, we're probably going to get a bit cosmic, bring back Lilandra, and explain the Starjammers.

SANDERSON: So. Any final words to sum it all up?

CLAREMONT: Not that I can think of offhand.

SANDERSON: Okay. Thank you Mister President.



Interview with **TERRY AUSTIN**

Throughout John Byrne's term as penciller on *The X-Men*, his work was perfectly complemented by that of inker Terry Austin. Austin worked as an assistant to comics artist Dick Giordano for nearly three years. It was on a *Star-Lord* story for *Marvel Preview* that Austin first worked with Chris Claremont and John Byrne. (This story was reprinted in a special edition comic book in late 1981.) Austin began inking *The X-Men* with Byrne's first issue, 108, and remained until Byrne left with issue 143.

Besides his work with John Byrne, Terry Austin is best known for his collaboration with penciller Marshall Rogers on *Batman* stories in *Detective Comics* at DC and on *Doctor Strange* at Marvel.

Austin will be doing the finished art over Walt Simonson's breakdowns for the forthcoming *X-Men/Teen Titans* team-up. He will also be inking the first issue of Marvel's *New Adventures of Indiana Jones* comics series, which was pencilled by John Byrne.

This interview was conducted in March, 1981, was transcribed by Kim Thompson, and was edited by Terry Austin and myself —P.S.

SANDERSON: How did you get to be inker on *The X-Men* and why is it that you chose to stay on the book for such a long time?

AUSTIN: Well, the first job that John [Byrne] and Chris [Claremont] and I did as a team was the black-and-white *Star-Lord* job. That was John Warner's doing, who was the black-and-white editor at that time. I'd always wanted to ink something of John's because I

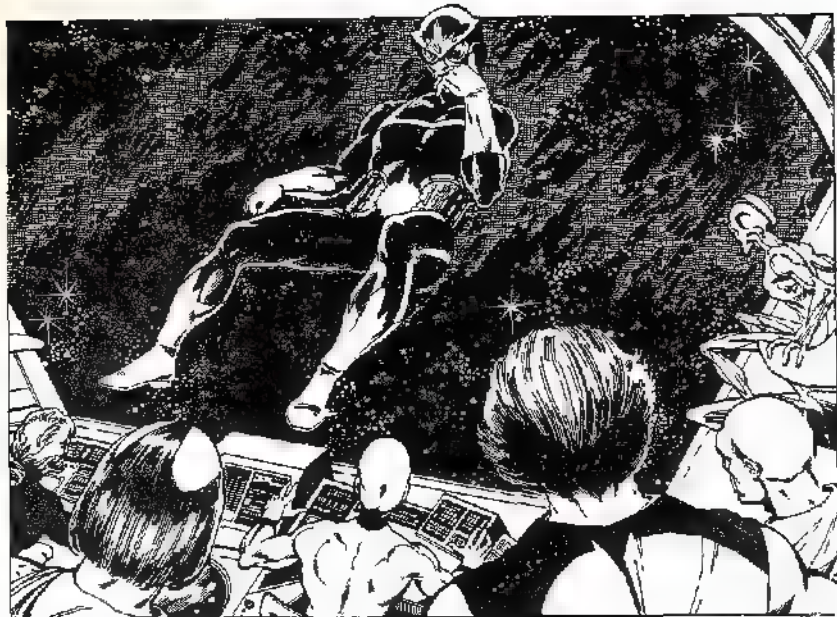
kept seeing other people do it and thinking that I could do a better job [laughter]. And when we did the *Star-Lord* job everybody up at the office liked it and they wanted us to do something else. They talked about doing more *Star-Lord* jobs, which is what I really wanted to do.

SANDERSON: Because you like science fiction?

AUSTIN: Yeah. I thought there were more possibilities for visual stuff because you could do all sorts of different planets and all kinds of weird aliens and things. But when it came down to it, Archie Goodwin was the editor at the time, and they had the *X-Men* book which was starting to sell and he wanted to go monthly with it and Dave [Cockrum] couldn't handle a monthly schedule and he decided, "Well, wouldn't it be fun if we got these guys on the book?" At that time, John came to town and we talked about it, and John decided he'd rather have me ink *Marvel Team-Up*, which he was also doing, because he felt that it would be too radical a change in the art style going from Dave Cockrum and Sam Grainger to John and myself, which are two different things altogether. John is a nut on consistency, y'see. Archie wouldn't go for it, though. So that's how we ended up on *The X-Men*. I really didn't have a lot of interest in the *X-Men*; I really didn't know who they were. I'd read the previous books, the ones that Dave and Chris did, but I hadn't paid a whole lot of attention to them.

SANDERSON: Did you pay any attention to them back in the days when Stan Lee and Roy Thomas were writing them?

AUSTIN: Sure. Yeah. I mean, those were the real *X-Men*. I grew up buying the ones that Kirby did. So these new guys—I was even insulted when that first



A contemplative Star-Lord in the very first Claremont-Byrne-Austin collaboration.

giant sized issue came out that they'd do a new team of X-Men. I thought that was sort of tantamount to sacrilege [laughter]. That was taking the name of these great old characters in vain.

SANDERSON: How come you and John never got around to doing any more Star-Lords? When Chris got around to doing more, it was Infantino who was drawing it.

AUSTIN: I guess John didn't have any time, and I don't think I had any time either.

SANDERSON: It has been said that that Star-Lord story you did do is going to be repackaged in graphic novel format and that extra pages will be done?

AUSTIN: Yeah. As a matter of fact I suggested that to [Jim] Shooter. While you're working all sorts of crazy things go through your mind. I was sitting here working, thinking about *not* working on John's stuff on a regular basis, and I remembered that when I was inking those Star-Lord pages, I brought the pages in before they were zipped and had them shoot stats because Archie and I talked about it and we thought it would be a good idea to reprint it in color sometime. So I went into Shooter's office and said, "Hey, I think Marvel's missing an opportunity to make some bucks" and his eyes got real wide and he said, "How?" I said "You've got this real hot team, this is the first thing we ever did, and I think it would be real nice to see it in color. In fact, I'd be real curious to see it in color. Especially if you got Glynis [Wein] or someone really nifty like Steve Oliff to color it. I think it would really be a sharp job." And I said, "Plus, we could do some new Star-Lord stuff. We could do a framing sequence or something, plopping it in there and sell it to the fan market and Marvel would

make lots of money and we could get paid for reprint money and the new stuff," and he said "Okay, great!" And a couple of days later Chris Claremont came up to me in the hallway at the elevator at Marvel and said, "Guess what! Shooter's talking to me about doing new Star-Lord stuff with you guys!" [laughter] And I went, "Oh Okay."

SANDERSON: Do you know how many new pages will be done?

AUSTIN: No, I don't. As a matter of fact, Shooter hasn't mentioned it to me since then, and I haven't talked to Chris and John about it.

SANDERSON: Why did you end up staying on the X-Men for so long once you got on?

AUSTIN: Well, I thought that John and I did a good job. I thought as a

team we worked real well and I complemented his pencils and everybody else kept telling me that I did and I think maybe I did. Once I got on the book and learned who the characters were, I saw that there were as many visual possibilities inherent in that strip as, say, Star-Lord, because they could go to other planets, they could have adventures in New York City, they could go to other countries, they could go to the Savage Land. I thought, "Gee, this is great," because that's the kind of strip that keeps me involved, if it's something that has changes in scenery and you don't use the same type of story all the time.

SANDERSON: What specifically do you like in John's work in terms of your inking?

AUSTIN: Oh, gosh [pause] Him. Boy, that's hard to pin down. I just think John has a really healthy approach to comic books. He draws really well, he tells the story really well; he can come up with costumes. I think John does really good comics. There are certain people who are really good comic book artists and John is one of them. He can draw anything that the writer will come up with. I don't know if he has a huge reference file...

SANDERSON: Oh, he was telling me in his interview that he makes a lot of it up.

AUSTIN: Well, that's probably why he's such a good artist. He can make stuff up.

SANDERSON: Are there particular things you like to ink on John's work — his people, his landscapes?

AUSTIN: Everything. John seems to do everything equally as well. I don't know. I really have never gotten bored with his work, as I said in the little thing I wrote in *The Art of John Byrne*. Obviously, we were very for

fortunate to find a strip where the characters could travel and there were characters who had extremely different costumes and personalities...

SANDERSON: Do you try when you're inking his work to bring out any specific qualities in the characters? Do you have certain things that you want to emphasize in John's pencils?

AUSTIN: In the characters? Jeez [laughter] ..

SANDERSON: Well, Chris once showed me a picture of the Beast that John did and then the same picture after you had inked it. It was one in which he looked very frightening and you had emphasized it when you went over it.

AUSTIN: I don't know. I guess that's one of the things that if you're an inker and you're halfway decent you don't do consciously. Part of your job is to take what's there and make it better. If there's an expression you amplify it. If there's lighting you play that up. I don't know. It's sort of something that I do that I don't even have to think of any more, which may or may not be a good sign [laughter]. Maybe I'm becoming such a hack that I don't even think about it [laughter].

SANDERSON: Is it easier working with a penciller over a long period of time or do you prefer working with a penciller over a long period of time or do you prefer working with different people? It would seem that you like to stay with one or two people since your best work is your work with John Byrne and Marshall Rogers.

AUSTIN: Well, I think it's nice when you can get on a book like X-Men and stay on it for several years because obviously you know the characters better than anybody else that's going to step in. You don't have to always be looking up costumes or anything because you know them—the cut of a boot or something, the way something looks from the back...

SANDERSON: And does it also apply to knowing a particular artist's style and not having to get accustomed to another artist's style?

AUSTIN: Oh, sure. There were times when I found that I did get bored because I felt like—oh, gosh, if I ever had to ink Cyclops's visor again, or if I had to do Storm's cape, or the hair on Logan's arms [laughter]. I was going to go crazy. But I found if I was getting bored doing John Byrne's X-Men that even if I inked another John Byrne job I'd get all fired up. I did a Spider-Man Annual, the Team-Up job with Red Sonja, and gallery pieces and covers and things, and found that if I was getting bored doing John Byrne's X-Men, if I did a John Byrne Spider-Man job I could come back and do the next Byrne X-Men and get all fired up again.

SANDERSON: You'd be working with different characters.

AUSTIN: Yeah, it was the same guy and obviously he



A particularly demonic-looking Beast from Byrne and Austin. [X-Men #136]

told the story the same way and rendered cars the same way and Spider-Man looked the same if he did him in the X-Men or if he was in his own book, but doing something different would sort of wake me up and I could come back to the next X-Men job and I wouldn't mind so much having to ink Nightcrawler's tail [laughter].

SANDERSON: I heard Chris say that for a while they were thinking of doing as many scenes with Storm as possible in which she didn't wear the cape because you didn't like inking it.

AUSTIN: I heard that. I mentioned it to John one time: "Gosh, you know, that cape." First of all, I dip my pen in that ink bottle and I look at that cape, and then I have to figure out, should I try to do those long curves freehand or should I get out a French curve and sit down there and rule them out so the line is perfect and doesn't waver [laughter]. Making up my mind as to which way to do it was probably harder than actually doing it, but it was just like "On, that cape!" [laughter]

SANDERSON: Which way did you end up doing it most of the time?

AUSTIN: Most of the time I think with freehand. I don't know why I do things the way I do half the time [laughter].

SANDERSON: Intuitively.

AUSTIN: But I guess John took it to mean that if he didn't lose the cape I was really going to be unhappy, but I was just making a joking comment. "Oh, the cape, John, my God..."

SANDERSON: Are there any other particular problems in the X-Men's costumes in terms of inking?

AUSTIN: Well, when Peter turns to meta, you have the metal segments, and then you have the little squiggly lines that connote reflections on the metal; that was not hard but it always took time. Which was not all that bad—I sound like a whiner [laughter]. Then there're Wolverine's claws and Cyclops's visor where you'd have to do some more curving lines. I find as an inker that my curving lines are the hardest thing because your hand goes so far in making the curve and then

you're bound to get scared and stop or else you'll think about what you're doing and your hand will waver and then you go, "Oh no, get out the white paint, see if we can salvage this!" [laughter]

SANDERSON: Which was the X Men issue that was the most fun for you inking?

AUSTIN: I don't know—I would think one of the Savage Land books. I can't separate if it was more fun to ink or if I just enjoyed the storyline more. Actually the whole storyline where we opened up in the circus and nobody knew how the X Men got into the circus or why they were there, or why they didn't have their memories, and then we found out that Magneto was behind it, and then they went to the Savage Land...

SANDERSON: And the final panel in that circus story was so impressive—very dramatic.

AUSTIN: The full-page shot of Magneto?

SANDERSON: Yes.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that was one time when I had some problems up at the office. I put zip on the figure because Magneto's figure had been in shadow for the entire job and I felt it was sort of silly suddenly in effect to turn on a spot light and have him standing there, so I thought I would grade it and make it more muted so it wouldn't be such a visual shock from the standpoint of, here's the character who's been black throughout the entire strip, now suddenly he's bright red standing there. The colorists up at Marvel jumped up and down and said that that zip was going to print totally black and Jim Shooter said, "Well, let's print it, and if it doesn't work, I will write notes to all of the inkers saying 'never use this zip.'" I knew better because this is a zip that I use a lot and I knew it was going to print lighter than it was on the artwork. So they went with it and it turned out fine. And as far as I know, the colorists never came back and said they were sorry they had such a fit over the zip on that figure [laughter] but I think it added to the drama of that page.

SANDERSON: When do you most like to use zip?

AUSTIN: Namely to add texture to add emphasis. If you put zip on something you tend to call people's attention to it, which is something I've learned over the years. You can't look back at my earlier stuff and use that criterion.

SANDERSON: Speaking of stories that were fun, how long did it take you to do all that graffiti in the drug story?

AUSTIN: [laughter]

SANDERSON: And how did that idea come about anyway?

AUSTIN: Well, John did a couple of issues of the X Men in layout because he didn't have much time and he was going to do them all in layouts from that point on. I'm a big chicken. Every time I took on a layout job

or somebody asks me to do a job in layout I'd get real scared. [laughter]

SANDERSON: Which did he do in layouts? There's that story with Storm visiting her old apartment... [#122]

AUSTIN: That was one of them. And also the one after that, the one I pencilled and inked the cover for, the one with Spider-Man swinging on the splash page. [#123]

SANDERSON: The first Arcade issue.

AUSTIN: So anyway, the pages came in and they were layouts. There were blank walls. I don't know, I've never been in a slum yet where I haven't seen all sorts of stuff written on the walls, not that I tend to hang out in slums... so I started to write stuff on the wall and [laughter]

SANDERSON: Lo and behold, it turned into the names of people at the office.

AUSTIN: I put in somebody's name, Bob Wiacek or Shooter's or somebody, and then I decided, "Well, I might as well put in so-and-so's name," and then my dog's name [Schnoppsey] and silly stuff like "The Franz Liszt Fan Club," and by the time I was done I decided, "Well, I might as well put in everybody's name" [laughter]

SANDERSON: And then to try to keep it all consistent from panel to panel.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that was one thing I consciously thought of. I was remembering Pogo's boat and how from panel to panel the name of the boat written on the front would change, and I thought, "Well, it would be neat if I did this for real and the stuff on the walls was always there always in the same place."

SANDERSON: Must have been hard.

AUSTIN: No, it wasn't hard. I just had to do it once in that big overall scene and keep looking back at it.

SANDERSON: Did anyone know beforehand that you were doing this or was everyone surprised?

AUSTIN: Nobody knew. When I turned the pages in, I didn't think anybody cared, either. Nobody leaped in the air and said, "Look, my name's in this book." [laughter] I heard later they had passed the book around and talked about how crazy I was or something like that.

SANDERSON: Oh, it was sort of appreciated, actually.

AUSTIN: I guess so. [laughter] Jim [Shooter] put a blurb in the Bullpen Bulletins about it, but I hadn't thought much about it. I just wanted to put stuff on the walls and put garbage on the floor. And I had some fun doing it.

SANDERSON: John has said occasionally that he's tired of seeing you draw Popeye into his work. Now I've never seen Popeye in your work. Where was he?



Byrne and Austin's superb landscape of the Savage Land. [X-Men #114]

AUSTIN: I did that once in *X-Men*. In every interview that John does, he would say, "Gosh, I'm really scared because Terry's going to put Popeye into some scene where some major character is killing another major character."

SANDERSON: *What scene was that?*

AUSTIN: It was the scene when Professor X is up on Lilandra's planet. There's a panoramic panel of all these aliens. It's a panel of all the important people in the galaxy, so I figured that Popeye had to be there. So I drew this little figure of Popeye here and I also did a figure of the Phantom Stranger because I knew that Glynis was going to color the book and she would catch it since Len [Wein] used to write *The Phantom Stranger* and he is a mysterious figure who can drift in and out of scenes without affecting them. Anyway, she did catch him and she colored him. But when the art work came into the office they had the coloring on him taken out because they thought it was just too blatant. It was giving advertising to another company's product.

SANDERSON: *But they didn't catch Popeye?*

AUSTIN: Popeye they caught and had him knocked out in the color too. But they didn't take either character out. I guess it's a small figure, so not a lot of people caught it, and every convention I've gone to, they've read where John says "Yeah, Terry put Popeye in the *X-Men*" so everybody asks me which issue it's in, and I can never remember [laughter] [#125, page 16] I can only make something up and they go to find it and never do and they grow up twisted.

SANDERSON: *Do you prefer working with tight pencils like John's or looser ones?*

AUSTIN: I'd rather work from tight stuff, although I'm inking Marshall Rogers's stuff on *Doctor Strange* now from layouts and it seems to be turning out well.

SANDERSON: *So maybe your hesitation over doing work just over layouts is disappearing?*

AUSTIN: I don't know if the hesitation is going, but the jobs I've done from layouts I've been very pleased with. There was a Howard Chaykin job, a *Dominic Fortune* job, that I was really proud of. After they gave me the job it sat here for over a year. I was just scared to touch it. I didn't know what to do with it until one day they called me up and said that it was scheduled, and I said, "Well, I guess I'll have to ink it then, huh?" And they said "Yeah, that would be real nice." [laughter] "If you could do that for us in a week or two we'd really like it because we're going to print it." I tried to filter Howard's style through mine, inking it all in markers, a la Chaykin, and the results pleased both of us.

SANDERSON: *Do you like the X-Men you did finished pencils on?*

AUSTIN: Yeah, it really wasn't that I had a hard time

with it. John and I met at a convention and he said "Well, I turned the pages in and they're layouts," and I hadn't even seen them at that point. I just sort of went, "Oh, layouts...oh, no! I don't now am I going to do it?" And I was so scared he said, "Well, okay, I'll see if I can go back to pencils after the second one." I think he'd started the second one.

SANDERSON: *Ah, he was planning to do all of them from layouts from that point.*

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think they worked out real well. For one reason, John does better layouts than anybody else in the business. They look much like his pencils only without black areas indicated. Nobody much noticed that those issues were layouts, so I guess I did what I was supposed to do.

SANDERSON: *Would you like to do a whole penciling job yourself?*

AUSTIN: Maybe. I did one for Warren. I don't have any big burning ambition to do another one. I'd rather do covers and things to keep my interest up. I'd rather draw a scene once and be done with it than draw it from five different angles, to try to make it look interesting.

SANDERSON: *Even when John does do full pencils, do you ever do things like add backgrounds or other sorts of things like that? For example I've seen things like a floor that John drew in as a blank floor that you put in a pattern on maybe it was a rug. Apparently you do this quite often.*

AUSTIN: Yeah. There've been panels where I thought that a background was called for. Last time I remember was in the *Future History* book where the future Storm had zapped a Sentinel who slumps into a wall. I felt that was a very subtle action and that without anything else in the panel, to take away just a small fraction of your attention, the action of slumping into a wall became too important and lost that fine edge of subtlety. So using a very fine line without any variation in thickness, I added some buildings in the middle background to contrast with the heavy blacks of the Sentinel in the foreground. Good ol' dependable Glynis picked up on what I was trying to do, as is her wont, and she colored the buildings with a very pale blue which helped push them back without giving any extra attention or importance to them. You were supposed to look at the main action and I tried not to take away from what John obviously wanted to emphasize while at the same time enhancing the effect. Who says there isn't any thought going into comics? And that's just one panel! [#142, page 11, panel 1]

SANDERSON: *How exactly do you feel you have to follow John's lines? How much room do you feel there is for interpretation?*

AUSTIN: Well, I always felt that I didn't have to worry



On this page and the next, Byrne ominously builds to a magnificently sinister portrait of Magneto [X-Men #111, Claremont-Byrne Austin]

about whether something was drawn right. I could concentrate more on line widths and what lines were and what they could do. That's more what I'm interested in. I'm not interested in a job where this person's back is badly drawn and there's no structure in this other guy's arm so you have to stop and you have to redraw the arm. I'm more interested in the overall impact of the artwork, and if it's drawn well—and John obviously draws very well—then I can concentrate on the things that I like, which are line weight and texture and adding some grit to it, adding some detail.

SANDERSON: Do you ever consult with John as to how he wants something inked?

AUSTIN: No [laughter] That generally doesn't work. I'm not speaking in terms of talking to John, but generally if you try to call up a penciller and ask about a panel or about a scene or a face or something, they have areas of blindness about their own stuff, as do we all. That's why editors came about, I suspect. Anyway, you're being paid as an inker and your job as an inker is to make it better. If there's anything wrong, you have to fix it, which means sometimes you wind up fixing some stuff that the penciller can't see should be fixed. He thought it was fine when he did it. I find that if you want to work with someone, you don't want to have all this hassle in terms of "Oh gosh, you've really wrecked this face here" [laughter]. Things go on an even keel if you can stand back from it and just do what they pay you for.

SANDERSON: Well, John says he almost always likes your work on him, so there can't be many hassles there.

AUSTIN: No, we really didn't have many problems. Years ago, I'd heard some horror stories about how

John would call up inkers in the middle of the night and yell at them for wrecking stuff. I thought, "Oh my gosh." [laughter] "This will be great but we'll try the Star Lord job, and it's okay if I never work with him from this day forward. I'd like to try one job just because I like his work." And we were off to the races for a few years there, so it must have worked out real well.

SANDERSON: Are there any other inkers you feel have especially influenced your style?

AUSTIN: I'm sure there are. I don't know if you can pinpoint any.

SANDERSON: Dick Giordano?

AUSTIN: Well, certainly Dick did just because I worked with Dick for two or three years, inking his backgrounds and secondary figures and anything else he didn't want to do, and from him I learned to adapt my own style to comic books, so that I could go up to the comic book companies and show them some stuff and get work. But I've looked at a lot of people's stuff. Klaus [Janson] I like a whole lot, I'm not sure if I've adapted any of his style to mine. Neal Adams, Alex Toth, Walt Simonson, Tom Palmer, Steve Leialoha... Gosh, I don't know. You could name most anyone and I would think I'd been influenced just by looking at their stuff, but I couldn't really point to anything in my work and say, "This comes from so-and-so."

SANDERSON: When you're doing inking, do you take into account the, shall we say, imperfect reproduction quality in printing comics? Does that affect the way you work?

AUSTIN: [pause] No, it doesn't. Some inkers have the attitude that there are things you can't do because the printing process is so bad. I would rather do the best job I can and have the printing try to come up to what



NEXT ISSUE: TWO WORDS SAY I ALL "TWO WORDS THAT" COULD VERY WELL SOUND
THE DEATH KNEEL OF THE X-MEN

MAGNETO TRIUMPHANT!



Storm returns to her parents' former apartment to discover (1) that it is full of young drug addicts and (2) that Terry Austin has scribbled graffiti all over the walls. [X-Men #122 Claremont-Byrne Austin]

I can do. It was a question that went through everybody's mind back when they first switched to those awful plastic plates and all the thin lines got very wavy in the printed version. I sat down and I really thought it out and the bottom line for me was that it was silly for an artist to let the printer tell him what he could and couldn't do. And I felt that I was an artist so therefore I shouldn't listen to someone whose involvement with the thing is putting ink on plates and running it off on cheap paper.

SANDERSON: So you do as best you can.

AUSTIN: Yeah. I think I've sort of been borne out because it's obviously worked out. With the printing that they're using now, obviously it's bad paper so the blacks aren't as black as they should be, but there's nothing in terms of fine lines or textures or patterns or anything that I would stay away from just because I thought they wouldn't print as well as they should.

SANDERSON: I'm wondering, are you going to be the inker on the projected X-Men book that Neal Adams is doing?

AUSTIN: Well, Neal has asked me to ink it. But

Marvel has not asked me to ink it [laughter], so I'm not really sure what that means. But every time I see Neal he says, "You're going to ink my job?" and I go, "Well, jeez, Neal, I don't know."

SANDERSON: Do you have any idea how far he's gotten with it by now?

AUSTIN: No, I don't. The only thing I saw some months ago were three pages in which a squad of futuristic police [apparently] killed off Magneto. It was good stuff, but while working for Dick and working at Continuity for years I used to ink a lot of Neal's background stuff. I know how scary it is to do something of Neal's because Neal will put down a line and to him it speaks volumes. One time when I was having problems on the *Superman Muhammad Ali* book I talked to him, and he said, "Everything's up in my head." I said, "Well, Neal, I don't have access to what's in your head, so therefore it's harder for me to figure out that these lines here are actually a spaceship with a little man with bug eyes waving a flag." [laughter] It's an exaggerated example, obviously, but to Neal each line he puts down signifies three or four other lines which in turn



Xavier (background left), Phantom Stranger (background left of center), and Popeye (background right) attend a state ball given by Lillandra (background right of center). [X-Men #125 Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

signify an entire object. And he works from an artgraph, which means he does a thumbnail size layout and blows it up on the artgraph and when you do that you have a tendency not to see all of the lines. You're sort of tracing them off a projected image and you see the lines on the paper, but sometimes it's hard to see which ones you've actually traced over and which lines you haven't. So therefore when you take the paper off the artgraph, there are some lines missing [laughter] and that was what used to give me fits when I was inking his backgrounds. I'd have to go up and say, "Neal, is this a cave or what?" "No," he'd say, "it's a subway tunnel." I'd go, "Oh, okay. Fine." [laughter]

SANDERSON: Nonetheless, if Marvel asks you, and hopefully we'll know by the time this book has gone to press, do you think you'll do it?

AUSTIN: Well, obviously, it'll be a hard job to turn down because it sets a hell of a precedent by the fact that the creative team gets to share in the royalty money. That would certainly be a point in its favor. And the artwork is certainly impressive and it would be an honor to work on something Neal had done. But I told Neal that if I do it I'm going to have to take the pages and go to Chile or someplace because [laughter] it's just too nervewracking to have Neal looking over your shoulder because obviously I can't do anything as well as he would do it. I'm not really sure if I could handle it or not. Neal is a perfectionist and I'd like to

think that his asking me to ink his job shows that he has some sort of confidence in what I can do, but still, I'm a scaredycat at heart, obviously. It'll be interesting. I'm waiting to see what happens. By this time maybe Neal has asked someone else to ink it for all I know, because I've been so noncommittal. But I've sort of been waiting to see if Marvel will ask me, because obviously I'll be working for Marvel, I won't be working for Neal.

SANDERSON: Maybe you should ask them to ask you?

AUSTIN: No, [laughter] I don't think that's how this business works. I would think if they wanted you to do it they'd call you up and ask you. Maybe I'm wrong.

SANDERSON: Did you ever have input in The X-Men's storylines, or suggest things you'd like to see John draw?

AUSTIN: No. I purposely stayed out of it. John and Chris had very strong ideas about what they wanted to do with the characters and who they were and I felt that the healthiest thing to do was to stay out of the middle. I felt that for the sake of the book that a third strong opinion wasn't needed. It would have only caused more problems, I'm sure. There were times when Chris would go into the office to plot with the editor and he'd say, "Hey, I'm going to be plotting the next five X-Men issues. how about coming in?" and I'd say, "I'd just rather not. I'd just rather stay out of it, do my part and

hopefully we'll have the best book we all can do."

SANDERSON: Now that it's in the past, do you have any strong opinions you'd like to express about the storylines?

AUSTIN: No, as a rule I thought the storylines we did were pretty nifty [laughter]. More than that I can't say.

SANDERSON: Well, what do you think of the fact that *The X-Men* has achieved this sort of cult status? Why do you think it's become popular?

AUSTIN: I don't know, I really don't know. Because that's been on my mind too. I didn't treat it any differently than I would have any other comic book job that I was working on. I'd get up in the morning and I'd pick up a page and sit down and I'd try to do the best job that I could, and obviously I guess maybe because the three of us—well, actually, more than the three of us, because Glynis was obviously doing her best job and Tom [Orzechowski] was really into the book, and

SANDERSON: It's amazing that you had five people sticking together for so long.

AUSTIN: Yeah, I think so too. I'm really glad that we could stick it out for so long. No one was more shocked than I when John called up and said, "Hey, I just quit *The X-Men*, you want to do *The Fantastic Four*?" and I went "Huh?"

SANDERSON: Well, when John decided to quit, did you give any thought to staying on the book?

AUSTIN: Yeah, I did. First of all I had to get used to the idea that John wasn't going to be there any more. John had always told me that he was going to do a hundred issues. When he called me up that day and said "How about going with me over to *The Fantastic Four*?" I couldn't even answer him, because I couldn't even conceive of him not doing *The X-Men* any more. It just seemed as if it was something that was going to go on forever, really, and in the back of my mind it has always been, "Well, as long as John is going to stick it out, I'll be there too." And then I got calls from Louise [Jones] and Chris later on, saying "Please stay with us; we'd like to keep as much of the team as we can." But once I got used to the idea that John was not going to be there anymore, it was sort of like a door had slammed. I don't know the best way I can put it is that once I got used to the idea that things were not going to be as they had been for the past two or three years month after month, it was sort of like "Well, it's all over now. What next?"

SANDERSON: But as it turned out, you didn't end up following John to the FF.

AUSTIN: Well, I did, but things didn't work out. It wasn't John's fault—so I moved on. I wanted to do *Spider Woman* but the book was incredibly late. I asked Jim [Shooter] if it was possible to go bi-monthly



Austin has drawn an entire building in the back ground of this panel. [*X-Men* #142, Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

until we caught up and he said, "No, we're committed to monthly publication." So, I turned it down and a few weeks later the book went bi-monthly. Sigh.

SANDERSON: So now you're on *Doctor Strange*.

AUSTIN: That's right.

SANDERSON: Is that indefinitely?

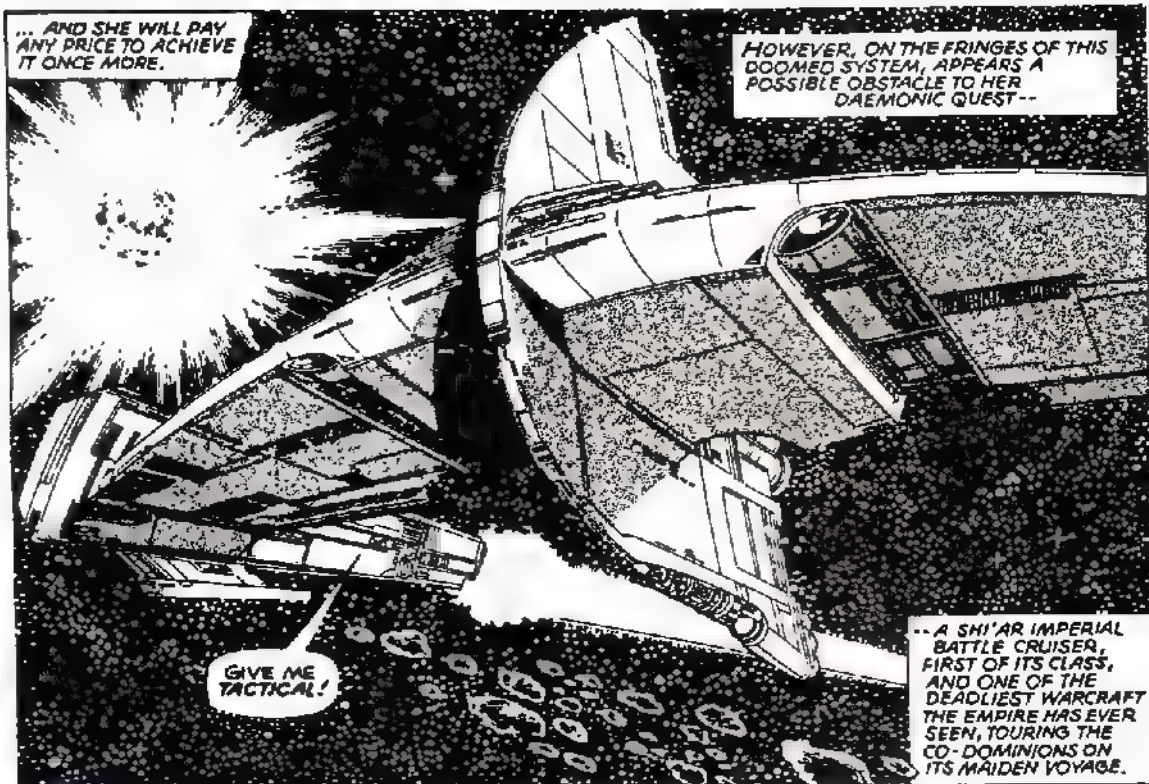
AUSTIN: That's for six issues.

SANDERSON: Which is as long as Marshall's staying on?

AUSTIN: At this point, yes. They said, "Hey, want to ink six issues of Marshall Rogers layouts on *Doctor Strange*?" It's a bi-monthly book, and I thought, "Well, maybe for a change, after doing *The X-Men* month after month for two or three years, it would be good to just sort of sit back and do a bi-monthly book, do something different." Obviously *Doctor Strange* is a whole lot different from *The X-Men*.

SANDERSON: What's the main difference between working with John and working with Marshall?

AUSTIN: Well, one of the differences is that Marshall is here, so if there's anything that I want to talk to him about, I can call him up and meet him up at Marvel or something. I don't think that the *X-Men* book suffered from John's not being here where I could sit down and talk to him, but it would have been fun to have had John over for dinner and gone out to see a movie or something, and then come back and sit down and talked about the *X-Men*, who they were and stuff. Because I found that every time John and I would be at a convention with each other, we'd be sitting there sketching stuff, usually him pencilling stuff and me sit



Byrne and Austin Space Cruisers, Unlimited. [X-Men #135]

ting there inking it, and fans would ask him questions about the characters and he would answer them and I'd learn all kinds of new stuff that I didn't know before [laughter]. It could be maybe not all of the stuff that John would tell the fans Chris would agree with later when I'd be at a con listening to him answer the same questions but I sort of missed that contact, of just being able to sit down and talk about the characters every once in a while. That certainly would have been nice. In terms of the artwork John's and Marshall's approaches are different. I'd like to amplify on that in some way. It's hard sometimes when you're dealing with such things as artistic styles to be able to find words to pin stuff down. Marshall's stuff is more design oriented. He will sacrifice good drawing or storytelling clarity for overall effect which is something John would never do.

One thing I find with Marshall is that our brains sort of go along the same track. When we were working on the first *Doctor Strange* we met up at Marvel and we sat down and talked about the character and the costume. And everything that I had been thinking about doing Marshall had been thinking about doing. It was like everything either one of us brought up, the other person said, "Yeah, that's great! I was thinking about that just last week that we should put more black in Doctor Strange's hair, maybe use it as a solid black mass, and

put the Ditko cosmic crackle back on the gloves." With John, he was off somewhere and he had his own ideas on the characters, and Chris did, and as I say, I was trying to stay out of it because I thought my input would be a factor that would get in the way. Whereas with Marshall, we can sit down and talk since we are on the same track with *Doctor Strange* exactly the same way we were with *Batman*. I'm not quite so reticent about bringing up something because nine times out of ten he'll say, "Oh yeah, that's great; let's do that!" And lucky for us, the writer, Roger Stern, is on our wavelength and is turning in some excellent scripts.

SANDERSON: What other plans do you have for the near future aside from working on *Doctor Strange*?

AUSTIN: I'm inking some stuff that Neal is acting as an agent for and selling over in Europe, pencilled by Carl Potts. Actually that was one more reason why I thought it would be nice to do a bi-monthly book. I thought maybe I could get back and get that project going. It's six eight-page chapters, and so far I've done two and Carl has just finished the sixth one.

SANDERSON: What kind of story is it?

AUSTIN: It's called *The Last of the Dragons* and it's a samurai-type thing where samurais get involved with dragons and the New World and Indians and evil priests and lots of other stuff. It subscribes to the premise that the folklore of the Orient that involves



The Beast discovers the X-Men have been mesmerized by Mesmero into becoming performers in a small-time circus. [X-Men #111: Claremont/Byrne-Austin]

dragons is based on there actually being dragons there at one time. There just aren't any left. It goes from there what happened to the dragons? Something must have happened to them because they aren't there any more [laughter].

SANDERSON: They migrated to America?

AUSTIN: Yes. I don't know how much I should say because this is Car's story.

SANDERSON: Anything else coming up?

AUSTIN: There's a real nice *Daredevil* story coming up by someone who's never done comics before. When I was talking to Al Milgrom about doing *Doctor Strange*, he said, "Well, since *Doc* is bi monthly, you'll have time to do some more stuff. I'd really like you to do as much stuff as you want to for the *Marvel Showcase* book. And he opened up the *Showcase* drawer and just had piles and piles of pages, and he was flipping through and there were a lot of nice pages in there, but he came to this one *Daredevil* job and I went "that one!" It's pencilled by Paul Smith, a guy that Al tells me has been working out on the West Coast in

animation, and I thought the look of the pages and the approach to storytelling were really interesting. In this whole drawerful of comic book pages his stuff sort of jumped out and hit me and I went, "Oh yeah. That one! Right there! That'll be nice. I'd like to do that."

SANDERSON: How many pages of the *Spirit* jam did you end up doing [Kitchen Spirit #30]?

AUSTIN: I ended up inking three pages: Brent Anderson's page and Frank Miller's two pages. Plus there was one page that I laid out that I was thinking about penciling but I sort of got sidetracked [laughter] so I didn't end up doing it.

Then there's the humor pages I'm penciling and inking for the back of the *Hulk* reprint comic with Sterno. They've been doing the *Hulk* as different genre characters: a science fiction hero, a super hero, a love comic hero. I wanted to do some weirder ones, so in future issues you'll see the *Hulk* as Bugs Bunny (*Hulk-Bare*), Archie (*Hulkie*), Dennis the Menace (*Hulkis the Horrendous*) and the Two-Gun *Hulk*.

And yes, Virginia, there will be a *Popeye Hulk*.



Interview with **JOHN BYRNE**

John Byrne's artwork on The X-Men was a major factor behind the series' rise to tremendous popularity by the end of the 1970s. Byrne was already a prominent fanzine artist when he started professional work for Charlton, where he drew Doomsday Plus One and the back-up strip for E-Man, Rog-2000, which starred a memorably comical robot. On coming to Marvel Byrne first collaborated with Chris Claremont on Iron Fist, and later joined him on Marvel Team Up, Power Man, and Star-Lord as well. Other series that he pencilled include Captain America, The Avengers, The Champions, and Marvel Two-in One. He even did the first issue of the mini series The Legend of the Batman for DC. But it was his work on The X-Men that brought him to prominence in the eyes of comics enthusiasts.

Byrne took over the task of pencilling The X-Men from Dave Cockrum with issue 108 when the magazine became a monthly. He soon began collaborating with Claremont on the plots as well. Byrne's influence can be seen as early as issue 109, through the introduction of the Canadian super-hero Vindicator, who was originally known as Weapon Alpha. Later, Byrne created an entire Canadian super-hero group, Alpha Flight, of which Vindicator was the leader. He also created the very popular character Kitty Pryde, who, as Sprite, has become the X-Men's newest and youngest member. The plots for issues 139 and 140 are credited entirely to Byrne, who also came up with the premise for one of the new series' best stories, the "Future History" of issues 141 and 142.

After three years on the X-Men, Byrne left with issue 143 to begin work on The Fantastic Four, which he currently writes, draws, and inks. Byrne has also recently plotted and drawn a special one-shot Silver

Surfer comic that was inked by Tom Palmer and scripted by Stan Lee himself. Finally, at this writing, Byrne has begun work on Marvel's forthcoming regular comics series based on the film Raiders of the Lost Ark, of which he will write and draw at least one issue.

This interview was conducted in March, 1981, was transcribed by Kim Thompson and was edited by myself with John Byrne's advice and approval.

P.S

SANDERSON: *Len Wein and Chris Claremont have been telling me in their interviews that they weren't very impressed with The X-Men until Neal Adams started drawing it. What's your reaction to that? How did you feel about The X-Men over the whole length of time it's been published?*

BYRNE: *Well, I fell in love with the book from the first issue for as long as I read it, which was about the first six or eight issues. And then when I came back, they were doing the Adams stuff, so I didn't see any of the stuff in between. The Adams stuff was very jarring to me and I had to get used to that because it didn't look like the characters I had left. They had changed their costumes and their personalities a great deal. But to me the definitive X-Men are those first six or eight issues of The X-Men, and the Adams stuff is just very pretty pictures.*

SANDERSON: *What is it that you particularly like about those first six or eight issues? What is it that makes them stand out?*



The spirit of Kate Pryde, having returned to the body of her 1980 self, Kitty, recounts the series of events that led to her alternate future. [X-Men #141, Claremont-Byrne-Aust n]

BYRNE: It's so hard to put into words. I suppose it was because it was all on the crest of the wave that Marvel was riding at the time and everything was so different from what I was used to. The Fantastic Four was totally different from the DC stuff I was used to, and it seemed that the X-Men, when they finally settled into the personalities that they developed, were different from the Fantastic Four enough to make them fascinating to me. There was something about each of them, Cyclops especially, that touched all the right buttons.

SANDERSON: Can you pinpoint that at all, especially Cyclops? I know you've said he's your favorite of the whole group.

BYRNE: I don't know, the idea of heroes who don't like their power, that whole concept with Cyclops especially.

SANDERSON: That he's got a power he's frightened of using? That endangers people?

BYRNE: And it's there all the time. The Torch can turn

off his flame. Sue can become visible. But Cyclops, as long as his eyes are open, the thing is there...

SANDERSON: Which might be, I suppose, the reason why you like the Thing as well.

BYRNE: Probably. Yeah. That had a lot to do with it. But it's even more so in the case of Cyclops. The Thing, although he's permanently ugly, does not have to use his strength. The strength isn't armed, so to speak, just standing around. But with Cyclops, that idea of an uncontrolled power was something totally new to me. Superman could turn off his infrared vision, Cyclops can't.

SANDERSON: You've called the Thing a tragic hero, I expect this means you think of Cyclops as even more so a tragic hero.

BYRNE: Mm-hm. In many ways. In a very different way, I think. I don't think he's as tragic as the Thing, since Cyclops can under certain circumstances lead a normal existence, which the Thing can't. But all of the X-Men have that sense of power that's "on" all the time. Iceman not so much, but there's no way for the Beast to get around looking like the Beast, and the Angel had to go through the terrible contortions with what must have been an extremely painful harness for his wings. That sense of the power as an inconvenience I think is what appealed to me.

SANDERSON: And does that tie into the theme of the prejudice against mutants; is this also something that interested you?

BYRNE: Oh yes. Well, that is something in the Future History story [#141-142], when we had the presidential candidate, and I came up with the slogan, "It's 1984, do you know what your children are?" That whole concept of the viper in the nest, that anybody can be a mutant, any normal parents can produce this creature, they don't know what it might be, that sense of the ultimate prejudice. Two white people are not going to produce a black offspring unless there was something way back there in their background, so that prejudice is very artificial, but the prejudice against mutants is very strong and very real, because they are there; they're a threat; they're a danger. It wasn't really until, I think, the Sentinels, which I read afterwards, going back, that we got that sense of the mutant threat story.

SANDERSON: You've often spoken as have other



-- AND HER WORLD IS SLOWLY FALLING APART



The first appearance of Kitty Pryde. [X-Men #129 Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

people of the FF as a family. The X-Men are also a family, especially the old group. Does that have any sort of appeal to you, this idea of a group of children who live together in a sibling relationship with a father figure?

BYRNE: I don't know that I was really aware of that so much. I never liked Xavier in the early days. That's something I commented about to [Jim] Shooter many times when I was doing *The X-Men*, that I thought the emphasis on the X-Men as a school was a wrong approach. Because that was one of the elements I didn't like when I was reading it. I would go to school all day, so I didn't want to come home and read about super heroes going to school.

SANDERSON: And who had to report to a boss.

BYRNE: Yes. Well, more than a boss, an instructor.

And people got demerits; people got bad grades. It just didn't appeal, because I was getting all the demerits and the bad grades. I didn't want my heroes to have to put up with that kind of stuff too. I said to Shooter a couple of times, I think the emphasis in the book is the line in the top copy, "feared and hated by the world they have sworn to protect." That should be the emphasis, not on the school.

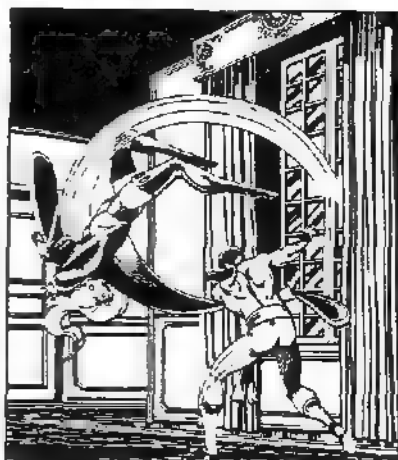
SANDERSON: So it wasn't so important to you that the original X-Men were all teenagers?

BYRNE: No, I don't think it was all that important. I had already encountered the Torch, who was semi-close to my age, and Rob'n, who was close to my age.

SANDERSON: Would you have liked them better if they were more independent? Acting more on their own, perhaps? Rather than this concept of their being

The Inner Circle of the Hellfire Club [X-Men #134 Claremont-Byrne-Austin]





Storm and Sebastian Shaw of the Hellfire Club do battle in a Byrne-Austn sequence from *X-Men* #132. Panel 3 focuses on both opponents' faces by placing them on the same level, while simultaneously making clear that the triumphant Shaw towers over the fallen Storm. Notice the sharp contrast between Shaw's rage and the tremendous force of his blow in panel 4 and his more relaxed posture and the disquieting stillness of panel 5.

students?

BYRNE: Well, I liked the idea of super heroes learning to use their powers. That appealed. It was just the concept of a stricter regimen as in a school, with Professor X saying, "You get ten demerits because you..."

SANDERSON: How do you feel about the Danger Room then?

BYRNE: [laughter] I hate the Danger Room. I see nothing wrong with training exercises, but the Danger

Room can kill, and I never liked that. Right from the start I didn't like the idea that the failure to pass this particular test carried the ultimate deterrent, which was that you die in there. I always wanted to do a story where Xavier got pushed in there by some villain or something and have him survive the danger and then realize how terrible it was and shut it down.

SANDERSON: Do you think there's anything morally questionable about Xavier taking these kids and putting them in these situations, like the Danger Room, where they could get killed, and even throwing them against super-villains?

BYRNE: Well, that's been debated at length all over the place. When we introduced Kitty, there was a strong reaction in the fans: was this right, that he comes along and takes this 13-year-old girl and puts her in this situation in which Magneto might come and dance on her? But I think the function of the X-Men, especially in the early days, was to get these people away from the threats, away from the society which was the danger to them, and to teach them how to use their powers so that they would not be a danger to themselves.

SANDERSON: Rather than emphasizing the use of their powers to fight the bad guys?

BYRNE: Yeah, exactly. The way it was structured, as I recall, in those early issues was that they would end up fighting simply because a new mutant had come along and Xavier had said, "Come and join the X-Men," and the guy had said no and it turned out to be a villain, which very quickly I suppose became tired and I didn't read it long enough for it to get tired. It was that element of getting these people where they would be better off rather than taking them and saying,

"Okay, your job is to fight bad guys," which is what the book has become, of course. They all eventually become "your job is to fight bad guys."

SANDERSON: You said you didn't like Xavier at first. What changed him so that you like him now?

BYRNE: I think just basically handling the character, doing the character. Getting to see the way he thought, having the manipulative ability to make him do the things I wanted him to do, so that he was still the



Emma Frost, the White Queen of the Hellfire Club. [X Men #129, Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

authority figure but less domineering, less totalitarian than I thought he was in the early issues.

SANDERSON: Did the issues with, say, his falling in love with Lilandra or his reactions to the supposed deaths of the X-Men have to do with humanizing him in your eyes?

BYRNE: The reaction to the death of the X-Men, yes. The falling in love with Lilandra, no. First of all, I had nothing to do with that, and secondly, people falling in love with people in comic books happens all the time. Xavier used to be in love with Jean, but that was forgotten a long time ago.

SANDERSON: Ah yes. They were all in love with Jean in the first issues.

BYRNE: [laughter] It came as quite a shock when Xavier admitted it to himself. But I think my approach to the character in my own head is what served really to humanize him to me, saying, "This is a guy who's doing a job that he has to do." A lot of it was in the issues he was not in. There was a sense of something being missing in those issues, that pointed out that he was a vital character, he was a supporting character.

SANDERSON: When you went back and read the issues in-between the Stan Lee/Jack Kirby issues and the Adams issues, what did you think of those? Were there any you liked in particular? You mentioned the first Sentinels story.

BYRNE: Yes. Well, nothing stands out too drastically unless it was something bizarre like the Barry Smith

issue, which stands out simply because it was so bad [laughter]. I'm not surprised really that the original X-Men book was never the big popular book I feel it should have been. Not to speak ill of the dead, but Werner Roth's art was mostly uninspired and at a time when you had Kirby building to the peak of Kirbyism and other artists like Neal Adams appearing on the scene and Gil Kane starting to do stuff, as opposed to Gil plodding along as he did for years and years, then you see that the book is just ordinary by comparison to what was happening around it. And the stories were kind of pedestrian. I'm not much impressed with it. I think that although the Roy [Thomas] and Neal stuff certainly turned the book around, it may have been too sharp a change to save a book by chucking everything and starting almost from scratch the way they did. Neal Adams's version of the characters and all that.

SANDERSON: Now, what did you think of the first issues of The X-Men that Dave Cockrum drew?

BYRNE: Oh, I loved them, I was always a big fan of Dave's. I was a big fan of the X-Men before I started drawing it. I made it known at Marvel that men would die if Cockrum ever left it and it didn't come to me. I very much enjoyed it.

SANDERSON: And that's how you got it.

BYRNE: [laughter] Yes, that's how I got it. Simple threat response.

SANDERSON: What was it that struck you in par-



The Shadow Knows: Jason Wyngarde casts Mastermind's shadow. [X Men #122: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

ticular about the new series?

BYRNE: I don't know what it was. I enjoyed the pictures that Dave was making, I enjoyed the stories that Chris was writing and there was that feeling that,



Moira MacTaggart, Xavier's former lover and the X-Men's steadiest ally. [X-Men #119: Claremont Byrne-Austin]

"Boy, the stuff I could do with these characters would be really neat too!" Which is how I was thinking by that time. By the time the new X-Men came along I was already crossing the line from fandom to prodrom and

starting to think in terms of what I could do with these characters. More than just a fan dreaming of "Gee, wouldn't that be neat," but with an actual potential there, which gives a different slant to any book

SANDERSON: Now, by the time you took over the new X-Men, you were already co-plotting Iron Fist and Team Up with Chris?

BYRNE: Not so much. I had a lot of feed into Iron Fist, almost nothing on Team Up. I wouldn't call myself a co-plotter on Iron Fist. I was just getting looser and looser plots from Chris, he was allowing me more and more leeway to insert characterizational bits and things like that. But really, I didn't come to think of myself as a "co-plotter" per se until that period in The X-Men when I started insisting on the co-plotter credit, which was something like #112. When I started to say it was a 50/50, or 60/40, depending on who put in more that month. When I started to feel that Chris and I were having an equal say in the beginnings of the story, that's when I started to feel like a co-plotter, but not really in the early days.

SANDERSON: Around #112, which means around the start of the Magneto story

BYRNE: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Chris has said that the Red Sonja Team-Up was pretty much your plot.

BYRNE: Yeah, that started as a Conan story when I was still a fan, and when we were doing Team-Up I turned it around and made it Sonja. Chris's job mostly was scripter. In those days I wasn't insisting on total plot credit.

SANDERSON: How did the idea for introducing Kitty Pryde come about?

BYRNE: Well, there were a number of contributing



Henry Peter Gyrich, National Security Council head of the anti-mutant Project Wideawake, and Jim Shooter look-alike [X-Men #142: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

factors that came about down the line. She started with that cover that I did for *The Comic Reader* with all the new X-Men wearing the old X-Men costumes, and I thought it would be neat to have somebody in the old costume. I always liked the old costume.

SANDERSON: Although it is a variation on the old costume she's wearing.

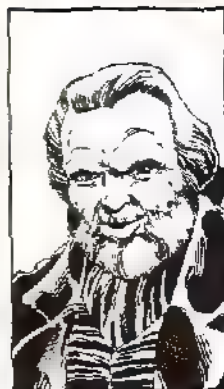
BYRNE: Yeah, a modernization. And I remembered somebody at a con or somewhere saying that he thought it would be nice if there was a constant change of cast in *The X-Men* and that the new kids wore the old costumes until they graduated when they got individualized costumes. So you would have four or five Kittys running around wearing the old costumes, who would be like the second team, and that's how it started as a second team. And then when I started to figure what I wanted the first one to be, I instinctively thought of a little girl. She started about 18, and as I drew her she got younger and younger. At one point Chris said we should call her Thunderbird, and I didn't like that at all but it put the "bird" name into my head and I started writing down bird names, trying to think of a name for her, and one of the ones I wrote for her was Kitty Hawk. And then I remembered a girl I knew in college whose name was Kitty Pryde, and I always felt that was a neat name, so as soon as I wrote "Kitty Hawk" I thought, "No—Kitty Pryde; that will be her real name." And then I came up with Sprite.

SANDERSON: Well, Ariel first.

BYRNE: No, Sprite first. And then we got all these Fresca jokes so we changed it to Ariel and just before going to press I said, "No, Sprite," the original name. Because Ariel doesn't tell you anything about her, but you can pick her out of the group on the basis of the name Sprite. I think I also saw *The Tempest* on PBS and realized that Ariel was a male.

SANDERSON: Is there anything that Kitty in the comics has in common with the real-life Kitty besides her name?

BYRNE: Only her name. They're nothing at all alike in any way. The real Kitty is a quite muscular short girl with short reddish hair the last time I saw her, about ten years ago.



Speed and savagery are the keynotes of the first half of this Byrne-Austin fight sequence from *X-Men* #132. The pace then slows as Harry Leland enters, halts Wolverine's charge, and then confidently forces him to the floor with his mass, including power Leland's resemblance to Orson Welles is particularly noticeable in panel 6. The cyborg, Donald Pierce, is based on Donald Suther and.

SANDERSON: Ah. So you have no way of knowing if she knows about this character?

BYRNE: Oh, she knows about it. I just haven't seen her. I have a mutual friend whom I told about the new incarnation of Kitty and she sent her a copy of the comic. So she does know about it but I haven't had any direct contact with her since I did it.

SANDERSON: You have said many times the time that Kitty is based on your impression of what Sigourney



Sprite demonstrates her "phasing" power in the Danger Room. [X-Men #141: Claremont-Byrne Austin]

Weaver would have looked like when she was 13

BYRNE: Well, a young Sigourney Weaver was how the face started to evolve when I started looking for the face. A couple of them started to look that way and I said, "Okay, that's fine. She can grow up to be Sigourney Weaver. That's a nice image."

SANDERSON: Any particular reason why you picked that particular image for her?

BYRNE: It was the Byrne girl of the time. I was going through that phase of the long thin face and the long kinky hair, because I was looking for something dif-

ferent from the established Byrne girl, which has the big eyes and the square jaw. She was going through that phase and when I drew Kitty that's what came out, and a somewhat modified version of that produced Bernie Rosenthal as well [in *Captain America*], although I don't think they look as much alike as some people do.

SANDERSON: A slight digression for a time here: you often seem to use real people as models for your characters and I've figured out some of them or heard of some of them. Let's see—I'll go down the list. In the *Hellfire Club*, Sebastian Shaw is Robert Shaw, correct?

BYRNE: Right.

SANDERSON: And Harry Leland is Orson Welles.

BYRNE: Right.

SANDERSON: Unmistakably. And Donald Pierce is Donald Sutherland.

BYRNE: Right. Jason Wyngarde was based on Peter Wyngarde. That's where he got the name.

SANDERSON: Who was also in the *Hellfire Club* episode on *The Avengers* ["A Touch of Brimstone"]?

BYRNE: Yes. Well, I don't remember him being in the *Hellfire Club* episode, but he was on a show in Britain and in Canada called *Jason King* which is where the name Jason Wyngarde came from. He should have been Peter King, but it came out as Jason Wyngarde.

SANDERSON: Well, he was in that episode of *The Avengers* as well.

BYRNE: I don't remember him. I'll take your word for it. I don't remember that particular episode very well at all. I based my *Hellfire Club* on my own images and a very dim recollection of what Diana Rigg looked like at the time.

SANDERSON: Now I know that the *White Queen* was named after Diana Rigg's character on the show. Was there any attempt to get any of her features into the way the character looked?

BYRNE: No. The name came after. I didn't know what her name was until after I saw the published book. She was just this blond lady. Actually, my visual imagery when I started to create the character was Faye Dunaway. That sort of Ice Queen type.

SANDERSON: And I'm told that you based your version of Moira MacTaggart on an actress from *Upstairs,*

Downstairs

BYRNE: Yes, Hannah Gordon, who was the woman who played Lord Bellamy's second wife.

SANDERSON: Is there anyone I've missed on the list of people whom you've based on actors?

BYRNE: Hmm... I don't know. Almost everybody at one point or another I've thought of as somebody just to give me a handle on what I felt the character looked like. Colossus, for example, when I first started drawing him, I thought of Max Baer, Jr. — Jethro [on *The Beverly Hillsbillies*] Nightcrawler I thought of as Robert Walden, the guy who plays Rossi on *Lou Grant*. There was a French actor whose name I don't know whom I saw years ago in a French movie who was exactly Cyclops and I was basing Cyclops on him. My early Jean Grey was Raquel Welch.

SANDERSON: Really?

BYRNE: Mm hm. You can see it very strongly in a couple of shots.

SANDERSON: Now that you say that I can see it.

BYRNE: And Xavier was Keene Curtis. Not Yul Brynner [laughter].

SANDERSON: You basically just used these real-life people as models to start from?

BYRNE: Yeah, just a hook. "Well, who is this? This is who he looks like."

SANDERSON: And then you go off in a different direction from there.

BYRNE: Yeah. It's easier to remember for me, when I first start handling a character, rather than trying to remember from issue to issue what the character looks like. I say, "Well, if this was a real person, what would he look like?" And then I just have to go through the files and say, "I'm drawing Raquel Welch here," and draw Raquel Welch.

SANDERSON: But in most cases you don't intend to try to get an exact duplicate.

BYRNE: Oh, no, no, no.

SANDERSON: Although Shaw and those characters came pretty close.

BYRNE: Well, I actually used a photograph of Orson Welles as a model for Leland. Shaw came mostly out of my head. In fact, a number of people thought that Shaw was supposed to be Ernest Borgnine [laughter].

SANDERSON: And I've also been told and pretty well guessed on my own that Kitty's mother is Mary Jo Duffy.

BYRNE: Well, yeah [laughter]. Kitty's father is a real person too, by the way. Carmen is a guy from back home who looks like that: we took his name and his physical appearance although his last name is not "Pryde."

SANDERSON: It might interest you to know that Mary Jo never caught on that she was Kitty's mother

PETER, IF OUR LOVE WAS MEANT TO BE, IT WILL BE. ONLY THIS TIME IN A WORLD WHERE OUR CHILDREN CAN GROW UP FREE AND UNAFRAID!

THE SENTINELS KILLED MY FRIENDS AND THEY KILLED MY, MY BABIES.



IF CHANGING THE PAST HOLDS OUT EVEN THE SLIGHTEST HOPE OF SAVING THEM, I'LL DO IT, WHATEVER THE COST.

I LOVE YOU, KATE.

AND I, YOU, PETER...

FROM THE MOMENT WE FIRST MET.



The Kate Pryde and Peter Rasputin of *X-Men* #141's alternate future as loving wife and husband. [*X-Men* #141: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

until I told her a year later.

BYRNE: [laughter] Well, now I won't survive my next trip to New York.

SANDERSON: So it's not just actors you use as models, you also use real people who are not celebrities whom you know personally. I'm told you often put your father in.

BYRNE: Oh, yes. Just about everybody at one point or another. When I was doing *Space: 1999* I used some friends as basis for some characters. There were a number of characters from the show whose actual faces we were not licensed to use. I had one friend who looked a lot like one of the other characters so I used him instead of the guy from the show and nobody was the wiser.

SANDERSON: Have you ever used any other comic people apart from, say, scenes of Chris and Roger [Stern] walking around in the background?

BYRNE: Well, Shooter is Gyrin...

SANDERSON: Ah, yes.

BYRNE: You know that, Peter.

SANDERSON: Sure.

BYRNE: [laughter]

SANDERSON: How would you compare Kitty to other teenage super-heroes through comic history?

BYRNE: Well, I had hoped when we created her that she was going to be more realistic. I hoped she was going to be more what a real 13½-year-old girl would be like. The degree to which we succeeded is an occasionally discussed, though never really argued topic between Chris and myself.



Sprite faces her trial by fire, her confrontation with the N'garai demon. [X-Men #143, Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

SANDERSON: *I think she succeeds more than most characters.*

BYRNE: I think she succeeds, but not as much as I would have liked to. I was very pissed off at Chris when he made her a genius. I did not approve of that at all and it was too late for it to be changed when I found out about it. I felt as if I'd lost the character at that point. She wasn't the girl I thought she was.

SANDERSON: *Do you think it's because she seems relatively close to a real 13-year-old that she seems to have evoked so much response from the readers?*

BYRNE: I think so, possibly, yes. I think that a lot of our readers are that age, and it gives them somebody to—that dreaded word—identify with. Because she's real, because she's all elbows and knees, klutzes around.

SANDERSON: *She's not a junior version of the adult*

super hero like Robin is?

BYRNE: Yeah. Exactly. She's as unique as possible.

SANDERSON: *And she's still learning how to be an adult, not to mention a super-hero.*

BYRNE: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

SANDERSON: *Now, how exactly do her powers work? How can we tell the difference between her and the Vision?*

BYRNE: Well, Chris has written her as the Vision, unfortunately, solidifying her shoulder to knock somebody's arm out of the way. According to the written version, what has appeared in the book, there is no difference between her and the Vision. The created version, what I told Chris she did, was that she cancels the valences between atoms so it's not her who becomes intangible, it's what she's walking through. In other words, the wall becomes intangible, not her.



vindicator strikes under his original name [X-Men #109, Claremont Byrne Aust n]

She's still solid. You can hit her when she's doing this trick. You can knock her out. You can shoot her because she's doing it to a specific thing. She's not intangible.

SANDERSON: If, say, she had walked through Destiny's gun-hand, the gun would have become intangible?

BYRNE: Yeah, but that wasn't the point of that shot. The whole point of that sequence was that Destiny was fully aware of all possible futures, so nothing could possibly happen that she wouldn't anticipate, but she couldn't see Kitty because of the future Kitty being in the young Kitty's body. That was a screening effect. So Kitty was effectively invisible to her and it was supposed to be the shock of suddenly having this thing go through her that caused her to miss. Not having the crossbow nudged out of the way.

SANDERSON: That's a very interesting concept for someone who could predict the future that she could see all possible futures. That didn't come across either.

BYRNE: No, she was supposed to be possible to scan all possible futures and select the best one. And the reason that everything got screwed up was that Kitty

was the X factor that she comments on early on in the story, the factor that has been introduced that she can't track properly. And the crossed over Kitty is invisible to her; she literally could not see her, being blind.

SANDERSON: Now, in practice, what can Kitty do that the Vision can't, and vice versa?

BYRNE: Oh, the Vision can stick his hand through people and hurt them a lot. Kitty can't do that. The Vision can fly. Kitty can't do that. The Vision can alter his mass. Kitty can't do that. Kitty's power is really very limited, it's a defensive power. I wanted somebody who couldn't throw zaps, whose power would be strictly something for "let's get the hell out of here" type of stuff.

SANDERSON: In effect then, she's not all that much good in a fight.

BYRNE: No, but she's real good at sneaking around and finding out where things are, and she's real hard to lock up.

SANDERSON: In this regard, how does she differ from Nightcrawler?

BYRNE: Well, Nightcrawler can be put in a cell with no windows and no opening doors and be stuck in there.

Vindicator's
wife Heather.
[X-Men #139:
Claremont-
Byrne-Austin]



He doesn't know what's around it [so he can't teleport out]. Kitty can find out what's around it just by sticking her head through the wall. She's very hard to imprison.

SANDERSON: I recall you also said once at a convention that if Kitty got in front of a wall you could throw something through her and it would go through the wall as well.

BYRNE: That was an early concept that I never really got to develop; the idea that if she were to stand in a wall or ball herself up in a wall she could serve as a portal for somebody, small enough. I don't know if I really would have gone with that. One of the other things she does, or did in her original concept, is to screw up machinery, because she cancels vacuums. That was how she popped the lock of Wolverine's cage in the Hellfire Club story just by putting her hand into it. It was an electronic lock and it just shut off. That was supposed to be explained, but of course it wasn't.

SANDERSON: You also show her in the Danger Room sequences seemingly walking on air.

BYRNE: Yeah, that's a manifestation of her power. That's an unconscious levitation thing that prevents her sinking through the floor. When she manifests her power, why doesn't she just go straight down? Because she floats slightly. She is learning to use that consciously to "fly," although it's very limited. It's like running up the air, it's the best she'd be able to do.

SANDERSON: If her personality isn't based on this real-life Kitty Pryde, have you taken aspects of her personality from any other real person—or do you even try to think back to what you felt like when you were 13?

BYRNE: No [laughter], I have no memories at all of what it's like. But when I was formulating my image of what she was like, I was trying to create just what I

thought a 13½-year-old girl would be like today, and that was as much as I gave her. I gave Chris all the things I had figured out and he took off in his own directions which were very different from mine. And of course the character that's in the book is the character. Whatever I had in mind for her is simply what I had in mind for her; it's not the character who's in the book, so it's not the character.

SANDERSON: Why did you decide to create the situation in which her parents were getting a divorce?

BYRNE: That was an early concept of Chris's that her parents were getting divorced. I said "fine" in the early stages, but the more I thought about it the more I didn't like it, and I suggested to him that the absence of Kitty brought them closer together. They suddenly found themselves empty nested and turned to each other. So that's what we were going to play them as. I don't know if Chris still intends to do that. I don't know what Chris plans to do with Kitty at all.

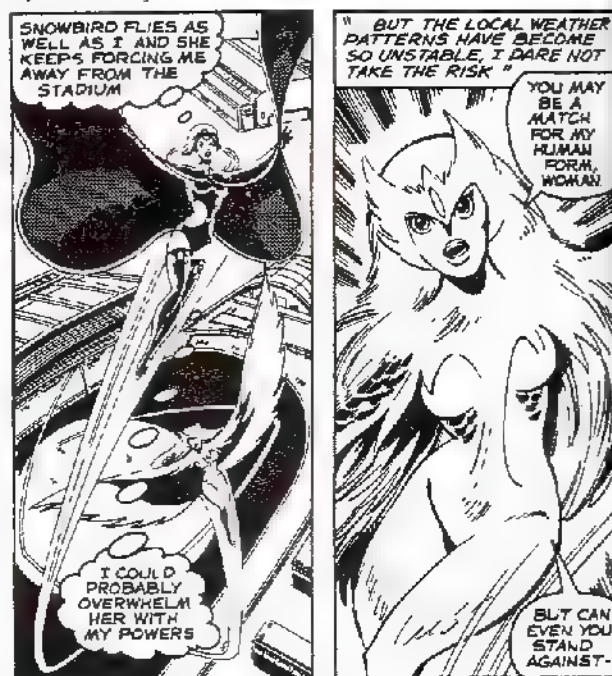
SANDERSON: That may be why they both came to the mansion together [#143].

BYRNE: Oh, yeah. You can assume that they are back together now.

SANDERSON: Whose idea was it to make her the first Jewish Marvel super hero apart from the Golem?

BYRNE: [laughter] That came about really as a fluke. The Kitty who evolved physically, in addition to look

Snowbird transforms into an owl. [X-Men #121 Claremont-Byrne-Austin]



ing like a young Sigourney Weaver, also resembled a girl who lived down the hall from me in the apartment building I was living in at the time, and she was engaged to a Jewish guy. She wasn't Jewish herself but she was engaged to a Jewish guy who had given her a little golden Star of David that she wore all the time. And there was just something about the very first drawing I did of Kitty that suggested this girl just enough that it didn't look right without the star, so I threw it in. And it stayed.

SANDERSON: And which one of you decided that that must mean she's Jewish?

BYRNE: That was me. I said, "Okay, she's wearing a Star of David, she's wearing it because she's Jewish."

SANDERSON: Now, in the *Future History* story, you show that in that particular future, Kitty and Colossus have gotten married. Now did you mean to follow this up in the stories set in the present, to show this relationship growing between them, and why do you think these two would be attracted to each other?

BYRNE: Well, we established from the very start that Kitty thinks Colossus is neat. That he's just a hunk. And they are very close in age, at least in my mind, though it was never clearly established, because I never thought of Colossus as being much more than about seventeen years old.

SANDERSON: So there's only four years difference.

BYRNE: Yeah. So that with Colossus being somewhat backwards in terms of his approach to the big city life and with Kitty being somewhat precocious, I think they would be close enough that they would be able to relate to each other. And we had this little crush that Kitty has that is slightly embarrassing for Colossus. When we were talking about what we were going to do with the *Future History* stories it seemed like a logical thing, that they should be married, that it should be a logical out come of the relationship as it now stands. And of course by virtue of the fact that that future has been cancelled—it's not an alternate future, it's a future that was cancelled—that whole relationship may or may not have gone away. We don't know now. They may get married, they may not.

SANDERSON: Now, how did the *Demon* story come



Alpha Flight. [X-Men #121 Claremont-Byrne-Aust n]

about [#143]?

BYRNE: [laughter] It came about the instant that I told Chris she was a young Sigourney Weaver. Chris said, "Why don't we..." and I said, "All right." We decided just to do the last fifteen minutes of *Alien* and hoped originally that it would be a little more subtle than the way it turned out. I thought that the reference to the movie in the book was a big mistake.

SANDERSON: Well, the demon did look pretty close to the alien.

BYRNE: I was trying to be as far from the alien as I could get, and still suggest it. I guess I failed, because a number of people have said how much it does look like

...JEAN-PAUL BEAUBIER, OLYMPIC AND PROFESSIONAL SKI CHAMPION, ON A PROMOTIONAL TOUR IN JASPER NATIONAL PARK.



NORTHSTAR.

...DR. MICHAEL TWOYOUNGAMEN, MD, STAFF PHYSICIAN AT THE SARCEE RESERVE HOSPITAL, OUTSIDE CALGARY, ALBERTA.



SHAMAN.

...CORPORAL ANNE MCKENZIE, RCMP, RECORDS OFFICER, ASSIGNED TO YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES



SNOW-BIRD.

...DR. WALTER LANGMOWSKI, PH.D. FORMER ALL-PRO LINEBACKER TURNED PROFESSOR OF BIO-PHYSICS AT MCGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL.



SASQUATCH.

...AND, FINALLY, JEANNE-MARIE BEAUBIER, A TEACHER IN LAVALLE, QUEBEC.



AURORA.

Five members of Alpha Flight in their everyday identities. (X-Men #120: Claremont-Byrne-Austin)

it. When I drew it I thought I was being really clever [laughter]

SANDERSON: Oh well, as long as Giger doesn't sue you

BYRNE: Mm-hm

SANDERSON: What did you think of the "rite-of-passage" element in the story? Did you think that her ability to face down the monster all by herself came too early in her development as a super hero or was it just at the right time?

BYRNE: I think it was okay. I think the timing was okay. It could be compared to that scene in *Iron Fist* where he rescues Alan Cavanaugh from the Scimitar and Cavanaugh says, "What are you some kind of super-hero?" and Iron Fist says, "Oh, well, no, I—uh" and realizes that he's a super hero. And I think it was very similar in that issue for Kitty - the realization that this is what she is, this is what it's all about. And I think that was nicely timed. She'd been in the book off and on for like a year. Hardly too soon.

SANDERSON: Now, back in the days when she was called Ariel, it seemed you folks were also working on a character Caliban. How did that concept evolve?

BYRNE: Oh, I was just in a comics shop at one point and I said "Ariel" and somebody said "Caliban" and it was like, "Of course if we're going to have an Ariel, we

must have a Caliban." So—

SANDERSON: What was the character going to be like?

BYRNE: He was going to be an incredibly ugly Living Cerebro kind of character, whom we would never see entirely. We would only see bits and pieces of him. And he would live in this dark room in the back of the mansion and Kitty would be able to relate to him for some reason. Chris defined the situation as being that she can't stand Nightcrawler because he is "wrong" somehow, he is a human done sideways, but Caliban was so hideous and so deformed that he was a broken thing, like a bird with a broken wing, and she could relate to him on that level. And it was going to be a very trying thing for Nightcrawler, the fact that Kitty could relate to Caliban but not to him.

SANDERSON: Why would he be kept hidden away?

BYRNE: Because he's so ugly. Because the other X-Men don't like to look at him and he doesn't like to look at himself.

SANDERSON: Really. So even they are not immune from prejudices.

BYRNE: No.

SANDERSON: But he is nevertheless a mutated human with normal human intelligence.

BYRNE: Oh, yes, everything about him inside his



Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau orders Vindicator to bring former Canadian agent Wolverine back by any means possible [X-Men #120 Claremont Byrne-Aust n]

head is the same, except for the fact that he's kind of a living Cerebro

SANDERSON: Were you going to get rid of the Cerebro computer?

BYRNE: Yeah, they were going to discover the tap that the Hellfire Club had put on it, or at least figure out that there was something amiss, and he was going to fulfill the function of Cerebro for them

SANDERSON: Had you worked out as yet how they were going to find him?

BYRNE: With Cerebro. It was going to be, "Oh, look! A new mutant!" And off they'd go.

SANDERSON: Now why is it that Caliban never got into the book?

BYRNE: Because Shooter killed the concept of a second team of X-Men, the X-Men in training, because he said it sounded too much like the Legion of Substitute X-Men, so it died right there and Kitty became the only one who ever made it into the book

SANDERSON: Had any of the others been worked out?

BYRNE: No, Kitty, Caliban, and Willie Evans, Jr., that

little black kid who was in the *Fantastic Four* about three years ago, who made the monstrous version of the FF, were the only ones we were sure were going to be in it.

SANDERSON: Now, as for Alpha Flight, how far back does Vindicator go?

BYRNE: Vindicator goes back to my college days, when he was called the Sentinel, and then the Guardian, and then he went away for awhile, and then Chris wanted a Canadian super-hero and he came back. I created him in 1970 or 1971, so he much predates Captain Canuck, for those who have assumed that he was copied from Captain Canuck. In fact, somewhere Duffy Vohland, I think, has a badly colored page that has Vindicator battling Captain America that dates from those early days. The original costume amazingly looks a lot like Captain Canuck's, which is why I changed it as much as I did

SANDERSON: How about his powers and his secret identity? Do they go back that far also?

BYRNE: Everything except his real name. His real name was originally James MacDonald. He was

originally a redhead, but when I came to drawing him unmasked in the *X-Men* I played around and finally settled on Patrick Wayne. There's another one who's based on somebody real. The powers go all the way back, which is the localized control of the electromagnetic field of the Earth. He's kind of an artificial Magneto.

SANDERSON: And that's what generates the force-beams that make him fly?

BYRNE: Yeah

SANDERSON: How did he pull off his disappearing act at the end of #109?

BYRNE: As was supposed to be explained in the text, with his localized control of the electromagnetic field of the Earth, he is able to render himself at rest relative to the turning of the Earth, which gives him an instant velocity of about 1,000 miles an hour. So what he did was just render himself at rest and took off—what would it be, eastward or westward, whichever way it would be—at 1,000 miles an hour. So he was just gone.



Wolverine gets annoyed [*X-Men* #132. Claremont Byrne-Austin]

before they could even realize it. I figured he would be something like sixty miles away before they'd realize he was gone.

SANDERSON: When Vindicator first appears in #109, he appears to have a very different personality than in his later appearances. He seems much nastier toward Wolverine.

BYRNE: Oh, that was just the way Chris wrote it. I never much had any concept of how he was talking or what he was thinking during that confrontation sequence, except that they were fighting, which meant that he wasn't too friendly.

SANDERSON: So at that point you hadn't worked out all the relationship that he and Wolverine had had in the past?

BYRNE: No, most of that came from Chris and I simply accepted it. None of it was too far beyond anything I considered right for the character.

SANDERSON: So Chris came up with the business of Hudson and his wife having found Wolverine and brought him to live with them and put him into Alpha Flight.

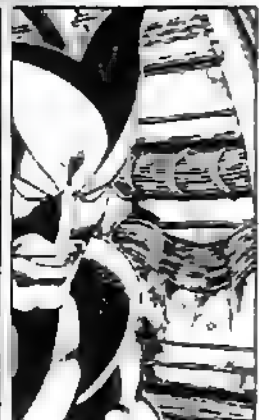
BYRNE: All that came from Chris. All I gave Chris in that first issue was reference to Heather. Chris at one point suggested that Heather was Vindicator's sister, and I said, "No, Heather is his wife and always has been."

SANDERSON: Do any of the other characters in Alpha Flight go back a number of years?

BYRNE: Only Snowbird. Snowbird goes back to the Gay Guy strip that I did for the college. She was the villain of the second strip that never got finished. It only ran for two issues. She had a totally different visual, but the name Snowbird started there, and when I came to create Alpha Flight she immediately suggested herself. Of course the name Anne McKenzie is an obvious reference to Anne Murray for "Snowbird."

SANDERSON: It was just the name that went back to the old strip or did she have the same powers back then as well?

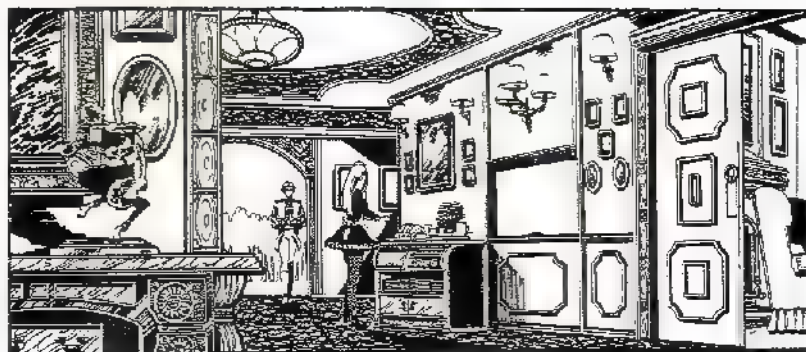
BYRNE: No, she had no powers back then. The name "Snowbird" and the job as records officer in the RCMP were the two things that came from Gay Guy. I don't think the name was Anne McKenzie then, I don't remember her name.



This Byrne-Austin sequence from *X-Men* #132 begins with a long shot of the few high mesas standing majestically against a brilliant sunset, capturing the idyllic mood of the preceding scene between Scott and Jean. There is then an abrupt transition to the many New York skyscrapers, jammed tightly together beneath a dark, stormy sky, the scene of the upcoming battle in which the X-Men will be ignominiously defeated. The second tier of panels provides another transition, from the wealthy Hellfire Club members on the sidewalk above, to Wolverine and Nightcrawler stalking the sewer below. Note the abruptness and power of Wolverine's move in panel 6, and his satanic smile in panel 7.

SANDERSON: Now Snowbird is the descendant of a god.

BYRNE: Yeah. It's the kind of thing we can never clearly tie down because it's stealing another character.



A study in party crashing: Wolverine invades the Hellfire Club mansion [X-Men #133: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

but during the '40s there were some Canadian comics which you may have heard of called the Canadian Whites—they were in black-and-white—and one of the characters was a lady called Melvana who was based on an actual Eskimo goddess who was called Melvana and the actual Eskimo goddess is incredibly ugly and millions of years old. The super heroine, though, was incredibly beautiful and my Snowbird is the daughter of that Melvana although we can never actually say it. As close as we ever came was having a reference to her talking to her grandfather Hodiak who is the spirit of the Northern Light, and on the basis of that a number

of people have figured out that her mother was Melvana the Eskimo goddess, but not Melvana the Canadian Whites character.

SANDERSON: Do you feel that she was brought up on Earth or in the realm of the gods?

BYRNE: I don't know that much about her. I think probably in the realm of the gods, because there's a sense of icy distance to her at least in my mind.

SANDERSON: Despite some of the time when she speaks rather colloquially.

BYRNE: There were a number of things that Chris did that I asked him to change that he didn't, which is why I've asked him not to use Alpha Flight any more in *The X-Men*, because the next time they appear I want to do it and I want to make sure that everybody talks and acts the way they're supposed to so that the next people who handle them will know who they are. Snowbird should not use phrases like "See you around, boss" and things like that. Anne McKenzie uses phrases like that; Snowbird does not. It's a very strong split personality.

SANDERSON: Not unlike Thor/Don Blake, I suppose.

BYRNE: Very similar, actually.

SANDERSON: Now she's able to turn herself into various animals who are always white.

BYRNE: Any arctic creature—and the whiteness is just her. It's a magical power.

SANDERSON: And the animals she turns into, are they always the same size and weight that she is?

BYRNE: It started out that way, but when I tried to draw the size of the polar bear she would turn into it came out very tiny, so that went away. She turns into

whatever size she needs. If she turns into something smaller than herself, then it comes out to her size. So she turned into a giant arctic owl. But if she turns into something like a bear, she gets bigger. A 105-pound bear is real small.

SANDERSON: How did the others evolve? Did you have anything in mind, any idea of what the dynamics of the group should be when you were deciding who should be in this group?

BYRNE: No, nothing beyond the fact that we've got Vindicator, who's the heroic leader. I decided there should be some sexy lady who's got the hots for Vin

Sunfire's cousin,
Mariko. [X-Men
#118: Claremont-
Byrne-Austin]



indicator; I decided there should be your bastard character, I decided there should be a big strong guy. The sexy lady and the bastard turned out to be brother and sister, and the big strong guy, of course, turned out to be Sasquatch. Beyond that I'm not entirely sure where Sasquatch came from. The name obviously came from [the legendary Canadian monster], but exactly where he came from, how he was evolving, I don't know. It was after I saw Sal Buscema's drawing of Walter Langkowski that I realized he was Steve Landesberg from Barney Miller, which gave me the hook I needed to figure who I had been drawing. As for the twins, Northstar and Aurora, Northstar came first, and he is based on Peter Pan, just to get a female version of that face.

SANDERSON: How did you decide to tie Sasquatch into gamma-rays? There's nothing green about him.

BYRNE: I just decided that because of his similarity to the Hulk he might as well have gotten his powers from it, and what Roger Stern and I put together to explain why he didn't turn green is that he was doing his experimentation way up North during a particularly heavy sunspot period and he got some cosmic rays mixed in there as well, so he came out orange, like the Thing. He would have been a green furry guy if it hadn't been for that little zap of cosmic rays.

SANDERSON: And is there any particular reason why he can control the changes and retain his sanity, or is that just chance?

BYRNE: He did it on purpose. One can imagine something along the lines of the Hulk TV show, that he deliberately bombarded himself, that he did it under extremely controlled conditions, so he knew exactly what he was doing, and he directed the gamma rays exactly where he wanted them to go, and the only X-factor that came into it was the coloration.

SANDERSON: And how about Shaman? How did he come about?

BYRNE: Oh, I forgot about him. God. [laughter] I felt we needed a native Canadian, which he is. And of course the twins are French-Canadian just because we needed somebody to be French. Langkowski is Polish because when I was looking for the name I remembered a friend of mine in high school whose name was Walter Langkowski and I said, "That's a good name for this guy." There's another one who's got a real name.

SANDERSON: There's not a large Polish population in some areas of Canada?

BYRNE: No, I'd say there's a large Ukrainian population, so Langkowski I suppose could be a Ukrainian name.

SANDERSON: How would you compare the group dynamics of Alpha Flight to the X-Men? They don't all live together, it seems, and they seem more quar-

Darth Magneto. [X-Men #112: Claremont Byrne-Austin]





Byrne-Austin sequence from the "Future History" story in *X Men* #141, involving the adult Kate Pryde and .



An eye for an eye: A journey from the Black Queen's terrifying eyes into the terrified eyes of her victim Wyngarde [X-Men #134, Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

BYRNE: Neither one of us set out to write a villain, but he was being very terse, very harsh saying "Go do this." And then we added an apology, I suppose, in the second appearance. We softened him up and said, "Look, he was just doing what he had to do as prime minister of Canada."

SANDERSON: Apparently there was a lot of publicity about the story in Canada at the time.

BYRNE: Yes. A great, great deal.

SANDERSON: Negative or positive?

BYRNE: Mostly positive. The thing sold like crazy. It sold better than *Crazy*. Ahem.

SANDERSON: Even though you didn't get much fan mail from Canada, you say?

BYRNE: Not a lot. We got some, we got a few letters saying this was nice, but the most positive mail was from the States, which I thought was encouraging.

SANDERSON: And the attitude of the Canadian press was "We're just happy to see Trudeau and Canada" instead of saying "What is this Canadian artist doing making fun of our prime minister in an American comic?"

BYRNE: Almost no reference was made in the Canadian press to me being Canadian. There were several references to my having been born in England, but that's about as close as it came. The main slant of the coverage was the fact that Trudeau was the villain. They gave the impression that Trudeau was the Lex Luthor for that issue, and it was a page-and-a-half cameo.

SANDERSON: Now, you're planning to bring Alpha Flight back in *The FF*?

BYRNE: I hope to eventually, yes.

SANDERSON: And you'd like to do a mini-series with

them sometime, you said?

BYRNE: A mini series at least.

SANDERSON: Maybe even a full series? Make it a book?

BYRNE: Well, if there's a market for it I'd love to do a regular series.

SANDERSON: Wolverine—I know this is an old question for you—but why do you like him so much?

BYRNE: Because he's a homicidal maniac.

SANDERSON: And what do you like about homicidal maniacs?

BYRNE: [laughter]

SANDERSON: Some of your best friends are

BYRNE: Yes, some of my best friends are, but I wouldn't want my sister to marry one. I don't like homicidal maniacs per se, it's just that I like the concept of a super-hero who's a homicidal maniac, a super-hero who will use his powers the way we all know we would if we had them. However much we tie to ourselves about truth, justice, and the American way, we all know we'd go out and kick ass and take names if we had them. Wolverine does that. And that appeals to me tremendously, that attitude of "Hey, I've got these powers and I'm going to use them, sucker."

SANDERSON: You were saying before that the original X-Men had to learn how to use their powers, how to control them. Does any element of that enter into your appreciation of Wolverine?

BYRNE: No, that was one of the reasons I said to Shooter that a school was the wrong emphasis to take with the new X-Men, because so many of them were already fairly established in how to use their powers. Storm knew what to do with her stuff, Cyclops knew, Nightcrawler knew, Banshee knew, and Wolverine



Byrne Austin sequence from the "Future History" story in *X-Men* #141 involving the adult Kate Pryde and



...a middle-aged Logan (Wo verine) Notice Logan's entrance in panel 5 of the page at left



Scott is surprised and frightened by his inability to feel anguish over Jean's seeming death, and then changes the subject. [*X-Men* #114. Claremont-Byrne-Austin]



after a number of years of intensive training by the Canadian government, certainly knew.

SANDERSON: But I mean, do you see Wolverine as trying to restrain himself at times from being homicidal?

BYRNE: Well, that's where we ran into most of our troubles with Shooter on our dealings with the character. Chris and I got the impression that he wanted us to have Wolverine constantly fighting to restrain it, and that was not what we wanted at all. He's not learning to restrain it, it's not something he can restrain. When he goes nuts, and he doesn't say, "Oh, oh, I'm starting to go nuts; I'd better fight it."

SANDERSON: Is he afraid of going nuts, or does he like it?

BYRNE: He likes it. That was established way back. That was one of the things that Chris did right in the early issues and that we probably forgot about when he started misunderstanding what Shooter wanted from us.

SANDERSON: You may notice that in the second Doom issue [#146] Wolverine has this long soliloquy in which he says how afraid he is of losing control, of going into berserker rages.

BYRNE: Yeah, I know about the berserker rages. I haven't read that issue. All I've read in that issue is the Doom stuff, to see how Chris handled Doom. As I said when I left the book, I have deliberately avoided reading it.

SANDERSON: But you disagree with the idea that he is at all trying to control his rages. They just happen and he enjoys using the claws even then.

BYRNE: Well, as Shooter said when I got to talk to

him directly as opposed to having it relayed from Chris, if he had any control at all, then he should be arrested and put away for killing people. The only justification, as tenuous as it is, for his killing anybody, is that he doesn't have any control, and that's what's dangerous. That's what Shooter wanted, this sense of a time bomb ticking away in the midst of the X-Men. This guy, at any moment, for any reason, could go off, and he wouldn't necessarily kill a villain. He could turn around and deck Nightcrawler just for something to do.

SANDERSON: As he did in that sequence from the Christmas issue [#143].

BYRNE: Yeah, And then Chris had Xavier suppressing him, and Wolverine saying "Thank you," which was not the way it should have been written.

SANDERSON: Is it then irresponsible for the X-Men to have him as a member?

BYRNE: No, it's quite responsible. They are taking the role of the Wolverine's guardian. Their role is not only to protect the X-Men from humanity; it is also to protect humanity from the X-Men.

SANDERSON: To keep an eye on him, to watch him at least in battle, and to step in if he starts getting too rough?

BYRNE: Yeah.

SANDERSON: As in that sequence in the Future History story with Storm and Wolverine [#143].

BYRNE: Which sequence was that? Oh, where she stops him. Yeah. More or less. I think Storm is probably the only person who could have done that, talk him down like that.

SANDERSON: You're the one who came up with the

Nightcrawler does a "cartoon" take on seeing Snowbird as a polar bear. [X-Men #139: Claremont-Byrne Austin]



idea of his adamantium skeleton. So how exactly did he get it? And you also came up with the idea that he's sixty years old, which hasn't been mentioned yet in the book.

BYRNE: No, it's been hinted around at. I don't know whether any of that's going to come to pass, of course, but the concept of the claws, as soon as they came out of his body, I said to myself, "Okay, there's something funny here." Chris early on said that that as a mutation, that he had mutated these claws, which were biological adamantium. When I got up off the floor, I said, "No, this is what happened." And what I conceived of was that his power is [the ability for] total regeneration [of his body], except it didn't work on his bones. One day, he was in a tremendous accident and every bone in his body got broken, and everything regenerated except that when he got up out of bed, his weight broke his legs. And they realized that whatever it was he had didn't work on the calcium-based bones or whatever excuse you want to use. Then Vindicator came along and said, "Listen, the way your body heals, we can do something we can't do with any other human being, that is, we can remove each of your bones individually, cast them in adamantium and replace them," and that's what they did. A very long and probably painful process. They removed every one of his bones, except the spinal column and the skull which they reinforced. And as for the question, "Where do the red blood cells come from?" which everybody hits me with, his power is total regeneration and his red blood cells don't wear out, so he doesn't need new ones.

SANDERSON: So when you say "cast new bones,"

it's not that they were sheathed in adamantium, they are adamantium.

BYRNE: They are adamantium except for the skull and spinal column, which were just sheathed and reinforced.

SANDERSON: And it's his regeneration powers that keep him looking young even though in your concept he's sixty?

BYRNE: Mm-hm. Exactly. He's aging, but very, very slowly.

SANDERSON: And originally you were planning to do a story in which he met Captain America and Cap recognized him as an old war ally?

BYRNE: Yes, somebody he'd met, which was going to be the story that would establish that he's in his sixties.

SANDERSON: And you'd also figured out who his father was?

BYRNE: Yes, that was supposed to be Sabretooth. Now I don't know. I understand that Mary Jo [Duffy] is planning on doing a Sabretooth story. Whether or not she'll do anything with that I don't know. It's entirely up to her now. It's her character, because she has Iron Fist.



Guess who? [X-Men #139: Claremont-Byrne Austin]

SANDERSON: But to your mind, Sabretooth also has the regeneration power

BYRNE: Yes I figure Sabretooth is 120 years old.

SANDERSON: And his claws are just on his gloves. They're not natural?

BYRNE: The mutant power is regeneration. He's just wearing sharp gloves

SANDERSON: And was Sabretooth created with the intention of making him Wolverine's father or was that something that you thought of later?

BYRNE: In my mind he was created that way. I drew him that way. I don't think Chris originally conceived him that way, but I said "Hey, here's another Canadian guy who has a lot of stuff, so I'll just draw him in such a way that he could be Wolverine's father—or brother." I wasn't sure in the early days.

SANDERSON: Now, why does Wolverine prefer being with the X-Men than with Alpha Flight?

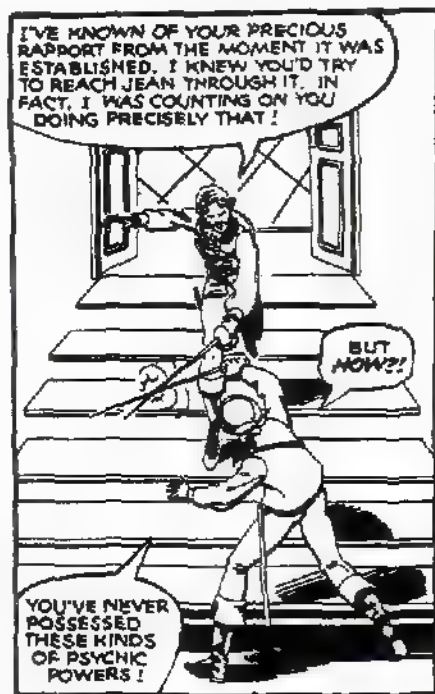
BYRNE: Possibly because it's less regimented. Because the X-Men are not tied to the military, so he's not Captain Logan and doesn't have the requirements of being Captain Logan.

SANDERSON: Does he find them a friendlier group than Alpha Flight?

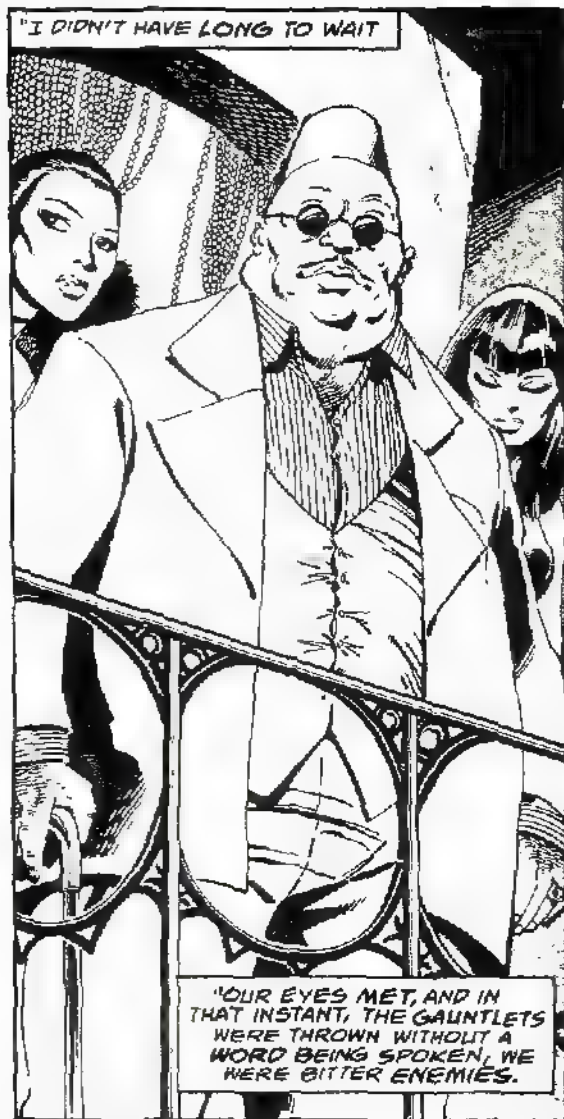
BYRNE: All in all, I think probably yes

SANDERSON: That may be part of the reason he stays with them, then

BYRNE: Mm hm



Scott and Wanda's duel within an other dimensional void [X-Men #133 Claremont Byrne-Austin]



Amahl Farouk, the first evil mutant encountered by Charles Xavier [X-Men #117 Claremont Byrne-Austin]

SANDERSON: How do you conceive of his relationship with the Hudsons?

BYRNE: Umm . . . It's very close. They gave him back something of his humanity when he had more or less lost it. It's really difficult to say, because I'm talking still in terms of what I'd conceived and what Chris and Dave might do with the characters now I do not know.

SANDERSON: How had he lost his humanity?

BYRNE: Well, as I saw it, in the accident that crushed him and broke all his bones. This happened a long time ago—well, just after the war—and it was some twenty-odd years, or longer, as Marvel time goes, before Hudson found him. So I figure that Wolverine was a

basket case, basically terribly crippled, in a wheelchair, body brace, the whole thing, living out in the woods as much by himself as he could and just becoming more and more bitter over the years. Then Hudson came along and said, "We can rebuild you—we have the technology" and in doing so gave him back a piece of his humanity. After a third of a lifetime under those conditions it would take a long time for him just to accept normalcy.

SANDERSON: Did you see Wolverine as having lived in the same apartment with them or was he just a friend who came by a whole lot?

BYRNE: He might have lived with them in the early days. As part of the humanization thing. If he'd been lost by himself for twenty years, he's got to adjust. "Here's color television" [laughter] "Here's movies."

SANDERSON: Is it the long period during which he had this problem with his bones that made him a homicidal maniac, or did that happen before that, just from all the killing?

BYRNE: That was before. I think a lot of that comes from his upbringing, from having Sabretooth as his father. I would think that this is an abused child like nobody's been before. I think that along came World War II and he was told "Go out and kill" and he discovered that.

SANDERSON: He found this great release from all this pent-up resentment?

BYRNE: Yes, he could send a great deal of his angst that way.

SANDERSON: Why has he only got one name, a last name? Didn't Sabretooth ever think of giving him a first name?

BYRNE: I imagine that he has a full name, but he doesn't use it. Just by coincidence Mount Logan is the tallest mountain in Canada and I have assumed that he was born somewhere near there and when he disassociated himself from Sabretooth he took the name "Logan." But he's really Fred Schwartz.

SANDERSON: Now how did the creation of Mariko come about?

BYRNE: Because I felt that he needed a counterpoint. That the brutality of Wolverine needed something delicate and fine to just counterbalance it. And rather than introducing a character in the X-Men or a member of the X-Men and add those qualities I thought I would



The psychic battle between the astral forms of Xavier and Amah Farouk.

introduce a girlfriend. And when we went to Japan [#118] I'd just finished reading *Shogun* and the concept of a perfect geisha was exactly what I was looking for—this tiny, doll-like creature, all frail with exactly the kind of things that would push all the buttons for Wolverine.

SANDERSON: Because there is a side of him that wants this sort of delicacy, this total opposite of what he is, wishing perhaps that he could be like that at times?

BYRNE: Oh, I don't know that he wishes he could be like it, but I think that even the most brutal of us have that sense of delicacy, that appreciation of delicacy,



from X-Men #117 by Claremont-Byrne Austin

and Mariko is delicacy personified

SANDERSON: Now in X-Men Wolverine has also been attracted to Jean and Snowbird. It seems

BYRNE: Well, the Snowbird thing was something Chris did that I didn't really approve of, and the Phoenix thing was Wolverine being attracted to what he recognized as elements of himself. In other words the motivation there was exactly the opposite of the motivation for Mariko

SANDERSON: Which do you think is stronger?

BYRNE: I think the Mariko thing, since he obviously got over Jean real fast when he met Mariko.

SANDERSON: Why do you feel some people — pros

and fans — get so upset over Wolverine's killings, and do you think they are in any way morally defensible?

BYRNE: Wolverine, as I have drawn him, has never killed except in self-defense. I think a lot of people just don't like the idea of a super-hero killing. There's a lot of people who say, "Well, this is going to function as a role model. We don't want our kids doing this." To me that's absurd because your kids can't do that. They don't have adamantium claws.

SANDERSON: They can always read Conan, too.

BYRNE: Sure! They can always read Conan and they can go out and buy a butcher knife and do what Conan does. But the important element of any super hero to me is the unreality, that you can't do what a super-hero does, so no matter what the super-hero does you can't do it. So it isn't a role model except on a purely moral level, and that's why, as I say, although it's totally nomicidal and he has no control over that, I was very careful that Wolverine never killed — except for that guard in the Savage Land [*116], for which you could come up with extenuating circumstances about it being self-defense — but he never killed unless the other person tried to kill him first.

SANDERSON: I suppose you could even say that off-panel the guard turned around and aimed the gun at him — or whatever else he was carrying — when he did it.

BYRNE: Whatever. It's also that that was obviously in a survival situation, a war time situation, that the Savage Land was at war with Garokk and his people. Wolverine was one of us and he was one of

them and Wolverine did just what he would have done in World War II

SANDERSON: Now, as for some of the other characters You were the one who came up with the idea that Magneto was Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch's father?

BYRNE: Yes.

SANDERSON: How did that happen?

BYRNE: The first time I drew Magneto with his helmet off it struck me that he looked like Quicksilver and looking back over all the years at all the stuff that happened between them, it suddenly seemed a more logical thing, since I hated the Whizzer thing. So I said, "Why don't we do this?" It began with Mark Gruenwald and



Mistakenly believing the other X-Men to be dead, Jean gives Xavier the bad news. Byrne conveys the pain of this encounter through very understated means. [X-Men #114: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

me kicking things around for a Quicksilver *Marvel Premiere*, and of course it ended up being in the *Avengers* and one page of the *X-Men* [#125]. And it was never supposed to be said flat out that that was the relationship.

SANDERSON: *Why is that?*

BYRNE: It was supposed to be one of those little Marvel "Hey, we've all figured it out but we've never said it" type of things, like Doctor Doom's real face. Things we know but we're not telling. I seem to remember Shooter being very mad when Chris said in a letter column that it was intentional and paternal.

SANDERSON: *What to your mind makes Magneto different in terms of personality from Dr. Doom?*

BYRNE: Well, I get a lot of argument on this from Chris, because we've had this discussion before, but Doom has a tremendous nobility, and Magneto does not. Magneto is just a son of a bitch. Magneto hates all humans and has a very Machiavellian "Let's wipe everybody out because that's the quickest way to get where we want to go" feeling. He would enslave humanity if he had the chance. Doom simply wants to rule, which is not quite the same thing. I think that the major difference between them is that nobility. Doom does not lie intentionally; Magneto does. I remember one sequence that Archie Goodwin wrote that to me was the definitive Doctor Doom, when Sue Storm in the Overmind sequence went to him for help, and he said, "No." And she said "The Doctor Doom I remember may have been cruel" and all of this "but he

always had a sense of nobility and now I find a man who is petty and perhaps a little afraid." And he stops her and says, "Hold, Susan Richards. Many demons rule Victor Von Doom, but not those of pettiness and cowardice." And that to me is Doctor Doom and Magneto is the opposite. I think Magneto has demonstrated that he would run scared if he felt he was overpowered and that he would cheat and connive to get what he wants; he would betray to get what he wants. Doom tosses people aside more than betraying them, which is a very fine line. In the 20th anniversary issue of *The FF* he uses the Puppet Master and then tosses him aside, but it's not quite a betrayal. Where I feel Magneto would set somebody up for a fall, I don't think Doom would do that.

SANDERSON: *Well, for example Mesmero [#111].*

BYRNE: Yes, exactly.

SANDERSON: *And the trap he came up with for the X-Men seems particularly sadistic [#112]. Do you think Doom would have come up with something like that or does this reflect Magneto's particular lack of honor toward people?*

BYRNE: Doom can be very very nasty and I don't doubt that Doom might do something to the FF along those lines, but I think it comes down to a question of motivation. I think that Doom does his nastiness because he is Doom and it is his right to do this, and Magneto does his nastiness because he's bloody-minded, just because he's nasty and he likes to be nasty. Doom believes himself to be the rightful ruler of



Wolverine vs Sauron: a Byrne-Austin double-page spread from *X-Men* #115

everything and therefore anything he does is justified Magneto is simply a bastard.

SANDERSON: Well, doesn't Magneto also have a belief that mutants are rightfully the masters of humanity?

BYRNE: Yes, but he doesn't have anything to back it up with. Doom has hereditary monarchy and a lot of other stuff to back his up.

SANDERSON: Where Magneto has just a sort of reverse prejudice—this master race fantasy. When you draw Magneto you often seem to make him look as inhuman as possible. You don't see the face. You either draw him in profile so that you can't see any features at all or when you show him head on, there's just blackness with perhaps only the eyes showing through those slits. Do you do this with any particular intention in mind?

BYRNE: Oh, definitely. The first time I drew him, to be perfectly honest, what I was going for was Darth Vader, and I seem to have succeeded on some points,

since one person looked at the page and hadn't seen Magneto before and thought it was Darth Vader. I was going for that sense of cold, machine-like menace, and then it simply became a good effect. You don't see Magneto's face inside that helmet, as opposed to that helmet that evolved the last time that Jack [Kirby] drew him, for example, which was wide open, where you could see practically his whole head. I think the whole point of that helmet is to be dark and mysterious and cast a shadow so that you can't see; features become very indistinct.

SANDERSON: And so it has particular significance for you in the fight when Nightcrawler pulled his helmet off and revealed the human features, sweating [#113].

BYRNE: Oh, yeah. Definitely. That's stripping off a certain psychological armor in a way. More than just taking off his helmet, he's bared a part of Magneto that was hidden.

SANDERSON: One of those times that that you have shown the features through the mask which impressed



John Byrne, futuristic archtect Garokk's domed city in the Savage Land [X-Men #116 Claremont Byrne-Aust n]

me as very powerful. You've also done this with Mesmero. Is the extreme close up on the eyes [X-Men #111, 112]. Why do you do this?

BYRNE: It's an old Kirby shot.

SANDERSON: Yes, I remember that. He did it in FF #59, for example. What do you like so much about that kind of shot?

BYRNE: Oh, I think it is tremendously powerful. I think when you zoom right in on somebody's eyes—which is an advantage comics have over movies, for example, so that you can do a tight focus and keep everything exactly where you want it—you can just generate so much power saying "Here are my eyes," and the eyes are the windows of the soul, and all that metaphysical crap.

SANDERSON: And he's projecting pure intense meanness, hatred, savagery.

BYRNE: "Hi, I'm mean and nasty and I'm glad to be home."

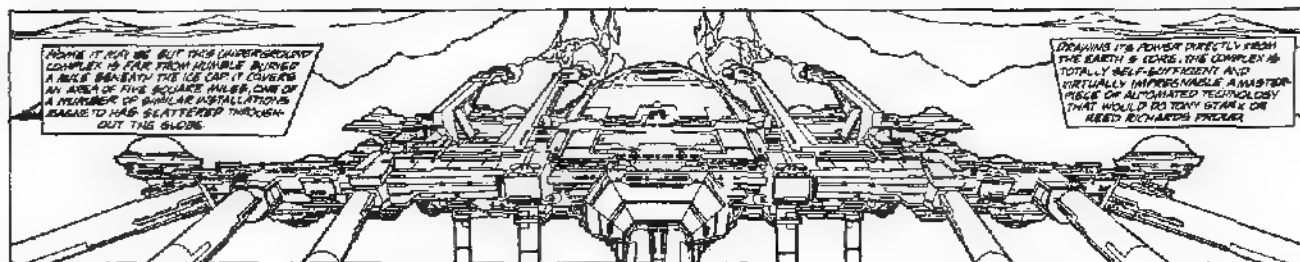
SANDERSON: We've already discussed Xavier and

Cyclops to an extent. What do you think of Cyclops's romantic life, his attitude toward Jean and so forth?

BYRNE: Well, I think that his romantic life was nonexistent before Jean. I think he was just very lucky that the first girl who showed him kindness was doing so out of more than pity or just simple friendliness. There was genuine feeling on her part for him. I think anyone who had come along and been nice to him would have generated the same emotional response in him, so he had a great potential for getting hurt there. Which could have been developed in the relationship with Colleen Wing, I think, who is a very fighty kind of character. If Scott had given his all, he would have found himself not getting nearly as much back. I think he was lucky that the first girl who showed him any kind of emotional output was Jean, who was showing a genuine side of herself.

SANDERSON: How do you think that he is affected by her death?

BYRNE: Well, if I was him, I would crawl back into my



How to build a supervillain's headquarters: flip over a Xerox. [X-Men #112: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

shell with a vengeance. I think it would be years before he would get over Jean. But, of course, in the case of comics you have to be very careful how you write something like that. You can't have the person going "Oh, woe, Jean," because eventually you reach a point where you have had a turnover in your readership and a lot of your readers don't know who Jean was. I think the new girlfriend, [Aleytis Forrester], even though I had a hand in it, was introduced too soon.

SANDERSON: Do you think Colleen was introduced too fast too after Jean's apparent death [in #113]?

BYRNE: No, because it was apparent and not real...

SANDERSON: But not as far as he was concerned.

BYRNE: It was real as far as he was concerned, but she was introduced for a very specific purpose: to create the conflict that never really came about when Jean came back. "Here's Jean back and here's Colleen, and oh jeez, I jumped into Colleen so fast and I did not care about Jean" and all that kind of stuff, which didn't happen because Mary Jo Duffy quite rightly demanded Colleen back to do stuff with her. Chris has an unfortunate tendency to think that once he's written a character it's his character, and I try to think that once I leave the book I leave the characters behind.

SANDERSON: There has been criticism that Scott did in fact not say, "Oh, woe" about Jean enough after her apparent death, and indeed some people have called him something of a cad for his reactions toward her death as expressed in the *Savage Land*.

BYRNE: Well, the fan criticisms I think are totally valid. And I hate to keep sounding like I'm down on Chris, which is the general consensus, but Chris did not write any of the scenes in the *Savage Land* the way we had plotted them. He didn't write them the way I wrote it in my margin notes, and he didn't write it the way I drew it. The whole confrontation between Scott and Ororo in the *Savage Land* was supposed to be Ororo coming up and saying, "I hate to intrude on your grief" and Scott saying, "There's no grief to intrude on. I've been thinking about it and somehow I can't grieve for Jean. I grieved for her once before. I was relieved that she came back, and then I realized that although Phoenix occupies the physical body of Jean, her personality was not the same, and I'm not so petty that I'd

continue to love her simply because she's built the same. Someday I might find myself loving again this woman who is Jean sort of, but for the moment it isn't Jean and I can't grieve over the death of somebody that I didn't really know." And what it evolved into, the way Chris wrote it, was "Gee, look at my moustache." "Boy are you childish, why don't you grow up." Which was not the scene. I was outraged. Roger Stern came up to Calgary with the make ready of that issue for his summer vacation and I was tempted to throw it off my balcony. We were sitting on my balcony reading it and I was yelling and screaming and the neighbors were coming out and going, "What's going on down there?" I was just outraged at the way that scene was written.

SANDERSON: Do you think it had been established sufficiently that her personality had changed so much from the old Jean?

BYRNE: I think anyone who reads a Chris Claremont woman vs. any other woman is going to see a totally different personality. She was not the Jean Grey that we knew and loved and Chris hadn't her enough as Jean/Marvel Girl for anybody to be able to say "Listen, it's the same character he wrote before." She was totally different. She was more of a go-getter, and I think it would have been very important to establish that Cyclops was not just in love with her body, he was in love with the personality that inhabits the body, and it wasn't the same personality. It had many of the aspects of the same personality, but it was more like this was Jean's sister, not Jean—somebody who had the same background but different motivations.

SANDERSON: Do you think in their scenes together, after she got back, before she got killed again, that any of these problems concerning Scott's relationship to the new Jean, how he thought of her, were resolved?

BYRNE: There were a lot of scenes that we wrote in afterwards, almost as an apology to everybody who told us that it came out [badly] the first time. But they were written in as an apology and they really were unnecessary. If Chris had done it right the first time we wouldn't have had the problem, and Scott would not have come off as the shallow "I am more concerned with my moustache than the fact that Jean is dead" person that he came off as.

SANDERSON: You said you don't like to sound like you're down on Chris all the time. Would you like to say what you like about his writing?

BYRNE: Oh, God, I could go on all night about the things I like about Chris's writing. When he doesn't fall into the habit of someone saying "This is good" so he does it over and over again, he does wonderful characterization bits. He can do scenes as I said, I think in *The Comics Journal*, like the scene of Iron Fist crying for his parents, which made me cry, and I drew it. The power in that scene was tremendous.

SANDERSON: Do you have favorite scenes of his in *X-Men*?

BYRNE: Umm... Not so much in *X-Men*. Most of my favorite Chris-stuff goes back to *Iron Fist*. But I think one of the things that Chris does phenomenally well is that he can take something like "here's a character that we've written in for two panels just so the villain can kill him" and in the space of those two panels you'll know that person and you'll care.

SANDERSON: Say, the scene where the two people get killed by the demon [#143]?

BYRNE: Yes, that's a classic one! That was a long one, really. That gave him lots of room to work. But he did it with Jenny Banks in the Proteus story, the little Scot girl who gets zapped on the road [#127]. She was in there for maybe three panels before she got killed, but you knew who she was; you knew where she came from, you had a hint of her personality; she was a real person.

SANDERSON: And so you could care about it a little when she got killed.

BYRNE: Yeah. This was not just a cipher who was zapped to show how bad the villain was. The same is true of the sailor who gets zapped by Proteus [#126]. We know he has a wife who doesn't like him drinking, and all kinds of stuff like that. A tremendous sense of who these people are in just the space of a couple of panels, and I think that's a tremendous strength on Chris's part. I find it sad sometimes that he gets locked into Chris-shit. Someone said he writes good women, so he writes the same woman over and over again. But I've said it to him many times. I've said, "Why don't you write something different?" We created Harmony in *Luke Cage* to be a dip, to be a total airhead, just to say, "Chris, write a total airhead." And



The X-Men climb the story title. [*X-Men* #116: Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

as it turned out, Archie [Goodwin] wouldn't let us do it. I created Kitty as a challenge. I said, "Chris, write a normal girl," and he couldn't do it; he made her a genius, which is not a normal girl, no matter what you do with it. My main faulting of Chris is that he falls into shits. I probably fall into shits with my art, but nobody's bothered to tell me about it yet. Maybe I'll fall into shit as a writer too.

SANDERSON: What's your concept of Ororo? What kinds of things did you want to bring out about her in the way you drew her?

BYRNE: Well, her costume got smaller. I had an image of her right from the very start as being what I set out to make Snowbird to be, since Ororo didn't turn out that way, which is a very cold, aloof person, someone who has lived as a goddess, was not a goddess but had come to think of herself as not more than human but beyond human. And that's not how she is, of course, because Chris introduced the Modesty Blaise element of the pickpocket and all that. I tried to portray her as a very regal kind of character. I always tried to



Byrne works the title of the Future History story into his splash page design [*X-Men* #141, Carey A. Aust n]

make her stand as straight as I could. I always tried to dress her in something that would suggest flowing robes, the royal aspect

SANDERSON: How about Colossus?

BYRNE: Colossus I saw as a very simple, very straightforward kind of guy. Jethro with brains. Chris at one point said he was a poet at heart, which I think is a good description, but he's a poet who doesn't have the words. He doesn't have the language, the control of his thoughts to be a poet. He's just a very simple, basic, straightforward kind of guy. He would have been a great pioneer, and he would have been great out there in the American West two hundred years ago.

SANDERSON: And Nightcrawler. Now, in your Wendigo story [#139] you seem to be playing him very much for comedy, with the hair standing on end

BYRNE: Well, that was the point. After three years on the book, I finally figured out who Nightcrawler was. I came to *The X-Men* being very down on Nightcrawler

because I felt that Cockrum had given him far too much of the spotlight. Then I proceeded to give far too much of the spotlight to Wolverine but [laughter] I felt in those early days it was *Nightcrawler Comics* co-starring the X-Men, so I practically wrote him out of the book as far as my end of it. I just did almost nothing with Nightcrawler. People were constantly saying, "Why are you doing almost nothing with Nightcrawler?" Finally, after three years on the book, I decided that Nightcrawler was the one thing that happened to. He was the guy who got the stupid stuff happening to him for no apparent reason. That was the whole point of the bear coming up and tapping him on the shoulder and the hair standing on end and doing the Bugs Bunny wrapping around-Wolverine thing. He was going to be the unintentional silly point of the book.

SANDERSON: The comic relief character

BYRNE: Yeah. But not voluntarily. And of course that proved to be almost my last issue, so I never got to do anything with that, once I finally figured out who he was.

SANDERSON: How about Banshee?

BYRNE: Banshee I always thought didn't really belong, which is why I did what I could to get rid of him and finally succeeded in getting rid of him. He was the older, wiser head who was unnecessary because

there was Xavier. His power was a long distance zap which is unnecessary because of Cyclops. His costume lost any outstanding points it had as soon as we had Phoenix, because he was the redhead with the green-and-yellow costume. So I liked Banshee a lot in terms of his personality but I could never really think of him as belonging in the group and I remember after we wrote him out with #129—the issue that introduced Kitty Pryde—some five or six issues later I realized he hadn't been in the book for five or six issues and that I hadn't missed him.

SANDERSON: How would you describe the way Terry Austin inks your work on the book?

BYRNE: Oh, for 99% of the time I love Terry's stuff. As in the case of the little girl with the curl, when he was good he was very, very good, and when I didn't like it I didn't like it with a vengeance. My only problem with Terry was that his stuff is so clean and so precise that when I started to get into my Frank Miller mode, I

"IN TIME, MORE A WHOLE
MAN THAN I'D BEEN IN
AGES, I LEFT KIRINOS
AND MOVED ON TO
CAIRO."

"THERE WAS NO PARTICULAR RHYME NOR REASON TO MY
ACTIONS. I WAS YOUNG, I HAD MONEY--AND I HAD NO REAL
DESIRE TO RETURN TO THE STATES AND MY RESEARCH
INTO GENETIC MUTATION."



John Byrne's Cairo. [X-Men #117. Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

found out it didn't work with Terry as an inker because anytime I did scuzzy blacks they would tend to get cleaned up. Terry would do an effect, the Terry Austin version of the scuzzy black, but it didn't say what I wanted him to do. [He was] not taking what I had put down and turning it into the inked version of what I wanted. With everything else, it was just amazing. I would do a scribble and then when the book came out, there would be exactly what I meant that scribble to be, fully rendered. Phenomenal stuff. But if you look at the atmospherics the dark shadowy stuff that I did in the Hellfire Club story, it's not quite right, it's not quite Colan and Palmer, which is what I had in mind when I was pencilling it. Ninety nine percent of the time I worship the ground that Terry walks on.

SANDERSON: Were there any scenes you drew in X-Men that were particularly hard to conceive, particularly hard to find a way of doing?

BYRNE: [pause] Well, I was always playing around with stuff... I'm trying to think of anything...

SANDERSON: Well, for example, the duel between Scott and Wyngarde on an astral plane with the blank backgrounds [#133]

BYRNE: Yeah, that evolved out of laziness. It suddenly clicked that I could do a reasonably effective shot without any work at all. I think the sequences that gave me the most trouble were the sequences in the Danger Room. a) because I didn't like the Danger Room and I was starting out with a bad psychological thing, and b) because I just seemed to draw a blank every time I tried to come up with new and interesting ways to threaten them. It just seemed to be beyond me, which is why I am so glad that the Fantastic Four don't have a Danger Room.

SANDERSON: Let me try naming a few sequences that I find particularly memorable. How about the psychic war between Xavier and Farouk [#117]?

BYRNE: Oh, that's from a book called *The Killing Bones*, which is in the Guardian series by Peter Saxon, in which there's a psychic war between an esper character in England and an aboriginal bushman in Australia. They have this war across the nether planes. And it was always such powerful imagery that was evoked in the text that I always wanted to do something like that in pictures, and I sort of took the Doctor Strange element and tossed it in and came up with the psychic battle.

SANDERSON: Did this book have sequences like the one that turned up in X-Men #117 in which you had the astral bodies clad in armor and so forth?

BYRNE: No, the astral bodies were naked in the book all the way through. The only thing that I lifted directly from a sequence in *The Killing Bones* was the sequence in which Xavier's astral form is lashed across the back by a psychic bolt and his real body is burned. There's a sequence in that story in which they're battling and the astral form is cut and the real body bleeds, so I used that, but the rest was my interpretation of what was happening.

SANDERSON: How about the sequence in which Xavier gets the news that the X-Men are supposedly dead [#114]? You've spoken of how you tried to get subtle but very dramatic effects.

BYRNE: Yeah, that happened shortly after Shooter told me I did the best moments of quiet drama he'd seen in comics and I said, "Okay, this is moment of quiet drama number 83 coming up here." I seem to remember having my Berni Wrightson hat on when I did that sequence. I'm not sure exactly what I was thinking of in terms of its being Berni's but there was something about the way I structured it. I was thinking, "This is the way Berni would have done it." Of course, this is almost three years ago.

SANDERSON: In two of the Savage Land stories

WITH THAT, AN EFFERVESCENT, ENTHUSIASTIC KITTY, AND SURPRISINGLY, A SLIGHTLY WARY STORM, GET TO KNOW KITTY'S NEW DANCE TEACHER OVER A POT OF ICED HERBAL TEA...



AS WE SHIFT OUR SCENE AHEAD A DAY, AND SOME THREE HUNDRED MILES TO THE NORTHWEST, FROM THE SUBURBS OF NEW YORK CITY TO THOSE OF OTTAWA, CAPITAL OF CANADA

THIS IS LAURIER DRIVE, A PLEASANT, WHITE-COLLAR NEIGHBORHOOD. MOST OF THESE MODEST, SEMI-DETACHED HOUSES ARE OWNED BY PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE -- TEACHERS, DOCTORS, LAWYERS, GOVERNMENT WORKERS. ALL JUST GETTING STARTED IN THEIR VARIOUS FIELDS...



AMONG THEM -- IN NUMBER 138A -- A BRILLIANT, MAVERICK RESEARCH PHYSICIST NAMED JAMES MACDONALD HUDSON...

John Byrne's Ottawa [X-Men #139: Claremont-Byrne-Aust n]

[#115, 116] you did double-page spreads, and then you stopped doing them after that. And they were always on pages two and three.

BYRNE: There was one in the Japan story, too [#118]. I think that was officially the last double-page spread until #137. I stopped doing them because I realized that as exciting and thrilling and dramatic as a double-page spread is, it advances the story exactly one panel, and when you have exactly 17 pages to play with, it's not enough. You need those pages. Now that we have 21 pages to play with, we may see more double-page spreads. There's one in *The Fantastic Four* #236, but that's a 40 page story. Those were done simply for effect. I wanted a big shot of Sauron and Chris wanted a big shot of the domed city. And that domed city, for which I have received endless praise, is my biggest cheat to date. It took me about a half an hour to draw that page [laughter].

SANDERSON: Really?

BYRNE: Mm-hm. The figures took me the longest, and then I just whipped off a whole bunch of argle-bargle and Terry turned it into something real. I don't know how long Terry took to ink it.

SANDERSON: It's interesting to hear that about the city. There was also the shot of Magneto's complex in the Antarctic volcano.

BYRNE: [laughter] That was another cheat. I only drew half of that, and we Xeroxed it and flopped it. If you look at that, you'll see that both sides are exactly

the same. There's a little piece of zipatone that Terry put in that they didn't take off and it's in the same place on both sides.

SANDERSON: Also, in the last of the three *Savage Land* stories [#116] and the beginning of the *Future History* [#141] you do interesting effects with the lettering on the title.

BYRNE: Oh, yeah. Well, whenever Chris would tell me what the title was, or accept a title I would come up with, I would try to work it in, which didn't happen very often. Chris would always put a margin note on his thing saying, "Try and work the title in," and then at the top it would always say, "Title has to be thought up later." I knew "To Save The Savage Land," and it immediately suggested that since they were climbing a mountain they should be climbing to save the Savage Land, and as for "Days of Future Past," Chris had come up with the title, so I worked it in.

SANDERSON: So it wasn't an attempt to do homage to any sort of style of doing titles that's been done in the past, like Will Eisner's in *The Spirit*.

BYRNE: Yeah, well, it might have had an Eisnerish effect.

SANDERSON: How much research do you do when you do pictures of exotic climes? For example, that double page with the firestorm over the Japanese city [#118], or there was the shot of Cairo once that seemed very detailed [#117].

BYRNE: I do minimal research. For the shot of Cairo I



The Joker goes to a discotheque [X-Men #130: Claremont-Byrne Austin]

dug out a copy of *National Geographic*, and subtracted all the buildings that looked less than twenty years old. For the shot of the burning Japanese city, I had a book on Japan that I just skimmed through. I looked at a couple of Japanese cities, and got the feel of their architecture, and just faked one. Because Chris originally wanted to do Tokyo, but there is the Byrne/Claremont curse that all our stories seemed to come true eventually, and I didn't want to be responsible for wiping out Tokyo, so I faked the city. But once upon a time, when I was working for Charlton, I used to do vast amounts of research. When I had to draw a plane, I would go out and buy books on planes and figure out how they worked and draw realistic controls, consoles and all that. Then one day I realized that I was drawing for one percent of my audience, because I realized most of the people who looked at the comics wouldn't know if it was right or wrong, and that the magic of comic books is that you can say anything, because the more you do it realistically the more of a chance you take of being wrong. So I pretty much stopped researching, so I evolved a fake New York—this is a city that looks like New York and I will do something that looks like England if we go to England and I will do something that looks like Whatever if we go to Whatever.

SANDERSON: How about Ottawa and Calgary?

BYRNE: Calgary was easy, I just looked out the window. Ottawa was mostly faked. The only shots of Ottawa I've ever done that were accurate were the shots with the Parliament Buildings, which I did with photographs, but all the rest is what I think Ottawa looks like. The same is true for almost every city I draw. We all have a general idea of what Moscow looks like, so if I was drawing Moscow I would use that idea—a lot of minarets and grey buildings.

SANDERSON: How often do you put visual jokes into your drawings? For example, there are the Larry Niven puppeteers in the Lilandra sequences and I suspect that one of the people in the Dazzler's disco

[#133] was the Joker?

BYRNE: Yes. One of the people was the Joker. I didn't want to put a color note on it, but I was definitely hoping that Glynis would light that panel so that everybody had white faces and green hair so that he would come out looking even more like the Joker. But I don't do in-gags, in jokes, or little things like that nearly as much as I used to because people are seeing them and looking for them and I think it distracts from the stuff, which is one of the reasons I didn't like Terry putting Popeye in the background [#125], because I felt it distracted from the story. I put myself into a recent issue of *The Fantastic Four* and then when it came time to ink it I changed it to somebody else because I decided I didn't want to be there.

SANDERSON: After all, every time you draw yourself in something bad happens to you. You get showered with glass [#121] or you get mugged on the subway [in Iron Fist].

BYRNE: Well, this time I was just standing in the lobby of the Baxter Building, but I figured no, I'll go away this time.

SANDERSON: It seems to me that in some shots Arcade looks very much like somebody that Tenniel might have drawn for Alice in Wonderland. Did you have that in mind?

BYRNE: No, not at all. That's an interesting concept. Chris takes full credit for Arcade. He gave me the name and I pictured this fat guy with a big spotted bow tie and the only thing that survived is the big spotted bow tie. Because when I went to New York and we were talking about the character, Chris said "Malcolm McDowell in an ice cream suit" and that's what I drew. And as it went along, he evolved into more Robin Williams than Malcolm McDowell, but the creation of Arcade lies entirely with Chris.

SANDERSON: Even the pinball motif and the surprise packages?

BYRNE: Everything.



Assassination for fun and profit: Arcade. [X-Men #122: Claremont Byrne-Austin]

SANDERSON: You do some interesting things depicting psychic behavior. For example there's one sequence [#131] where you have Jean reading this Hellfire Club flunky's mind and you do this half-face effect, one side Jean's and one side the Hellfire Club person's. Or the shot in which Mastermind goes cosmic [#134]. Do these take a long time to come up with or do they just come to you?

BYRNE: No, those are mostly the kind of things that just pop into my head. They just click and "Oh, it's working." Bam, there it is. I feel so good when that happens. It's usually the straightforward stuff that I really labor on. For example, that shot at the end of the first part of the Dark Phoenix saga [#135] when she's coming back and all the X-Men are sitting around in the kitchen. I labored over that shot of the kitchen far longer

than I labored over Mastermind going cosmic or Jean scanning the guy's mind.
SANDERSON: I always found that page was unintentionally hilarious because Scott's last words are, "She's coming back, and she's hungry," and they're in the kitchen.

BYRNE: The only thing I did in that that was intentionally meant to be funny was I had Nightcrawler and the Beast in exactly the same position – and noticing it.

SANDERSON: And noticing their resemblance to each other.

BYRNE: Yeah, they were sort of looking at each other. "Oh, gee..."

SANDERSON: There's also one time in the *Savage Land* sequence where you do a panel just before Sauron attacks Storm which looks as if it is lying on its side [#114]. You never tried anything quite like that again. Was this an experiment that you felt didn't work?

BYRNE: Well, it's a down shot, actually, and it was set up that way just to give me more room to play with. I think it worked as well as it would be expected to work in a situation like that. If I was doing it now, with the great added wisdom of two years or whatever it's been, I might set it up somewhat differently. I was interested in talking about such things a recent *Comics Journal* review of *Captain America*, commented that I don't have very "innovative" panel design. They held up one thing as an example of "unusually innovative panel design" from me, which struck me as very strange since most of the thought that goes into one of

my pages is what shape and position the panels are going to be in.

SANDERSON: There's that weird page in which Garokk is falling down that long tunnel, for example [#116]. And there's another one of your pages that I really like, the final page of the first half of the Magneto story, [#112] which ends with the close-up of Magneto's eyes, and with the eight shots of the X-Men above it reacting, and they all seem to have subtly different reactions.

BYRNE: Yes, I tried for that. I thought about personality in each picture. I thought this is Scott and he's grim, and this is Peter and he's rather childish, this is Kurt, he's this...

SANDERSON: And Ororo looks flabbergasted.

BYRNE: Yes, because she's in a claustrophobic situa-

lon, so she doesn't really know how to react

SANDERSON: In the opening of the first *Savage Land* story [#114] it seemed to me that the way you drew the Beast carrying Jean covered with snow, he looked like a statue.

BYRNE: Well, that was the second splash page I did for that, because Shooter rejected my first one, which had them cowering together in the snow, which I much preferred. It was a down shot of a very small Beast and a very small Jean right in the middle of the page surrounded by this vast whiteness, covered with snow. But then Shooter wanted them staggering, so I redrew it, but my heart was not really into that page. So if it worked out at all, it worked by just dumb luck.

SANDERSON: Now you've said that #137 is your favorite art job. Why is that?

BYRNE: Because everything works. It just all seems to fall together, click click click. Every shot worked exactly as I wanted it to, even the throwaway stuff I did like the deliberate sharpness of Gladiator striking Superman poses, and the Superman poses for me came across even better than when I deliberately try to draw Superman. All the little details right down the line, the reactions, the tiny little faces, the bodily poses, everything just worked. It clicked perfectly.

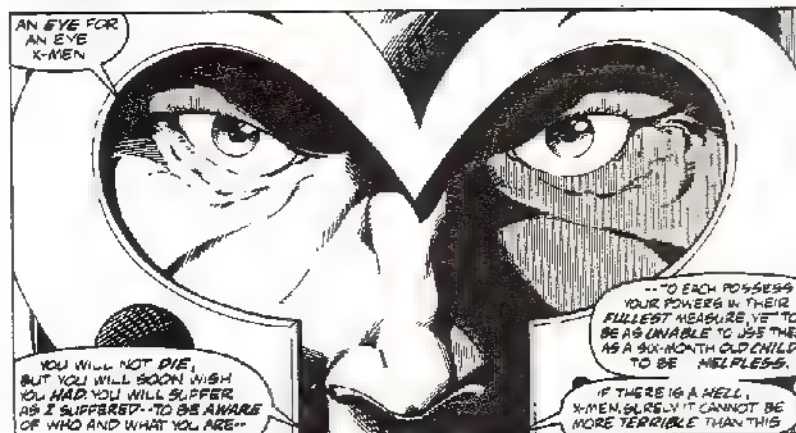
SANDERSON: Is there any particular sequence of storytelling or fight choreography, in *X-Men* that you think especially stands out from any of the others that you've done in terms of how well you executed it?

BYRNE: That's a toughie... [pause] I don't know. There have been a number of issues that I've had sequences that worked very well for me, in which the feel of the entire issue worked. #111, the circus issue, was one I enjoyed tremendously in the pencil. The reaction to Magneto the first time he appeared and the full-page splash of Magneto—that's one of the things I consider when I'm waving my own flag, because I do think one thing I do well is to have someone just standing there and looking menacing without striking a dramatic pose to look menacing. I went right back to Kirby when I drew Magneto, too. I ignored everything that had happened since and I went

ONE BY ONE THEY TRY, AND ONE BY ONE, THEY DISCOVER THEY CAN'T. THEIR MINDS ARE AS CLEAR AS EVER, BUT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, THEIR NEURAL CIRCUITS ARE BEING SCRAMBLED, THEIR MOVES ARE RANDOM, UNCOORDINATED. THE WORDS THEY TRY TO SPEAK EMERGE AS PRIMAL SOUNDS.



ONE BY ONE THEIR FACES TWIST INTO MASKS OF HORROR AS THEY BEGIN TO REALIZE WHAT'S BEEN DONE TO THEM.



NEXT ISSUE: TRIUMPH and TRAGEDY!

Byrne's skill in portraying emotions is shown in his depiction of eight differing reactions to the same situation—Magneto's trap—and his capturing of the evil intensity of Magneto's gaze. [*X-Men* #112: Claremont-Byrne-Aust n]

right back to the first issue and I really wish I could have gone back to the second drawing, second panel of Magneto, where he's very obviously wearing some kind of a metal chestplate. When he turned around it went away.

SANDERSON: You've also mentioned at conventions a list of artists that you feel have influenced you most strongly, but you've never explained, as far as I know, how any one of them influenced you or pointed to anything in your work that was influenced by them. So how would you say Jack Kirby has affected you?



An unusual "camera angle" from Byrne in this picture of Storm before her attack by Karl Lykos (Sauron). [X-Men #114. Claremont-Byrne-Austin]

BYRNE: If there is any power at all in my stuff it comes from Kirby. The sense of stuff bursting out of the panels that Jack did so well and which I am trying every day to get more and more into my stuff. A lot of times, especially drawing *The Fantastic Four*, I lay out a page as Kirby and then I render it as John Byrne. And I try to think "How would Jack set up this panel?" and then I set it up that way and then I render it with "realistic" stuff when I draw. But I think Jack when I lay out a page, except I don't restrict myself to the three-tiered layout of panels that Jack will do, except when I do so for effect. Power is a major thing.

SANDERSON: How about Steve Ditko?

BYRNE: Ditko is quirkiness. It's that little strangeness of twisting a leg this way, or posing a hand in just such a way, just for effect, just to do it that way, for no other reason than it looks neat. Which is, as I understand it, Ditko's major motivation for doing most of what he does: he does it because it looks good. And that's my major motivation for what I do in some things: "Well, Ditko would do it because it looks good; I'm going to do it because it looks good." Quirkiness. Power from Kirby and quirkiness from Ditko.

SANDERSON: And what do you get from Neal Adams?

BYRNE: Well, realism, I think, which is probably the wrong word. I said once to Roger Stern that I'd figured out what it was that Neal does. Neal draws people who look exactly like people would look if they looked that way.

SANDERSON: He makes you believe it.

BYRNE: Yeah. Nobody in the real world looks like a Neal Adams person, but boy, they sure look real in those pictures. And I've progressed or digressed or sideways-gressed away from being a poor man's Adams, which is what I started out as, and I think I've evolved more along my own lines, but still bits and pieces come through. An occasional hand will be rendered in Neal Adams style, an occasional face will

be shadowed in a Neal Adams style—quite intentionally. I'll say, "This is the way Neal would have done it." But it's that sense of realism that I go for, that comes from Neal. So that's power, quirkiness, and reality. What else do you want? [laughter]

SANDERSON: Well you've often mentioned Gil Kane.

BYRNE: Gil is anatomy. Gil knows muscles better than anybody. He draws flayed figures, there's no skin on his people, there's just muscle. And I look at Gil if I want to figure out how a muscle works. Where does this muscle start and finish

and what does it look like while it's working?

I've got "mood" from Frank Miller. I also got a lot of my mood from Gene Colan. Frank himself commented that he was getting carried away with it. He caught himself, he said one time, drawing a glass penthouse at high noon and everyone in it was triple lit and darkly shaded and all that. "Wait a minute, what am I doing?" But I look at Frank's stuff and I go, "Of course! That's what people look like when they're in the dark." And I've flashed on it ever since. The concept of putting the light source in the picture instead of outside the picture, so that people are standing in front of the light source, things like that which are very hard for me.

SANDERSON: With moods, you're talking about somber moods?

BYRNE: Well, just mood generally. Frank, I think, is a master of mood. Frank is one of those people who succeeds so well in one element of what he does that where he does fall down doesn't matter because he does something else that more than balances it.

SANDERSON: How about Frank Bellamy and Frank Hampson?

BYRNE: I got a lot of my storytelling from Bellamy in the sense of using the panel to tell the story, using the position and the shape of the panel. So if you want a claustrophobic sense, you use a long thin panel, if you want a sense of scope you use a wide panel, and that kind of stuff. It sounds very simplified. I wish I could get more into the kind of thing that Bellamy used to do. For example, stories set in the swamp would have dripping panel borders, and there would be lightning panel borders for dramatic scene changes and things like that. And from Hampson I just got—well, the same thing I got from Giles, the British cartoonist—the sense of normalcy, the sense that these are real people doing real stuff. And I think the great power of Frank Hampson on *Dan Dare* was that even someone like Dan Dare's partner Digby looked right because he had a way of drawing—believability! That's the word I was

looking for. Believability instead of reality. That's what I got from Hampson.

SANDERSON: Are there any other artists either in comics or in other media—paintings, other kind of illustration—that you feel have contributed to your style?

BYRNE: Oh yeah, I got a lot of my cheating on machinery—what I call argle-bargle, the various scritch-scratches and scratches that when it's printed comes out looking like neat stuff—I got a lot of that from John Berkey, whom you may know as the artist who did the King Kong poster for Dino de Laurentiis. He did a series of ads with futuristic elevators for Otis which were just amazing. He does wonderful futuristic stuff. Syd Meade is another one who's influenced me tremendously. Moe blues/Jean Giraud.

SANDERSON: Really?

BYRNE: I get my sense of grit from him.

SANDERSON: Are you affected more by the Moebius stuff he does or the Giraud stuff?

BYRNE: Much more by the Moebius stuff. What Howie Chaykin said at one time is that he draws an incredibly futuristic subway station and then he puts graffiti all over it, because that's the way it would be. Nobody else springs to mind immediately. As I said before, I'm just a sponge, anything I see that I like, I'll just pick up and incorporate. My style is constantly changing because I'm doing that. Right now I'm going through a very strong Kirby period again, doing *The Fantastic Four* again.

SANDERSON: How would you like your stint on *The X-Men* to be remembered in the chronicles of comics history?

BYRNE: Well, I'd like it to be remembered fondly. About the only thing that's bothered me since I've left is some of the references to "Cockrum's back" that gave the impression that there were Cockrum's issues and then there were three years of fill-ins and then Cockrum again. I'd like to feel that my contribution was a little more

than that, that if the success of *The X-Men* is indeed as strong as it seems to be, I'd like to think that I was contributory to that, and that perhaps some of it wouldn't be there if I hadn't done it. What wouldn't be there I don't know, but maybe there'd be six readers in Tucson who wouldn't be reading it because I hadn't done it, but that's enough. I'd just like people to remember that I did it, basically.

SANDERSON: Oh, I think they'll remember all right.

BYRNE: I know what it is. I want to be missed [laughter]



The pose here captured of the snow-covered Beast carrying Phoenix through the Antarctic makes them look like statues grimly embodying the title of the story [*X-Men* #114]



Interview with **CHRIS CLAREMONT** and **LOUISE JONES**

During the long months of preparing all of the previous material in *The X-Men Companion* for publication, Marvel began work on several new X-Men projects. Among these was the next DC Marvel collaboration, the long-promised team-up between the "new" X-Men and the "new" Teen Titans. Chris Claremont and Daredevil's acclaimed writer-artist Frank Miller made plans to work together on a four issue Wolverine solo series. Then came the biggest news of all: The 1960s had brought us the original X-Men, and the 1970s saw the creation of the "new" X-Men. Now, in 1982, yet a third group of X-Men would be launched, who would star in a new regular monthly comics magazine of their own. Marvel would now have not one X-Men series, but two running at the same time.

So another interview was required to bring the Companion up to date. This time I spoke with not only X-Men writer Chris Claremont, but also with Louise Jones, who began editing *The X-Men* on arriving at Marvel in January of 1980 (Her first issue was #137, the conclusion of the Dark Phoenix epic.) Before coming to Marvel, Jones edited *Eerie*, *Creepy*, and *Vampirella* at Warren. At Marvel she has edited *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Micronauts*, *Man-Thing*, *Dazzler*, and *Shogun Warriors*. Currently, in addition to all the X-Men projects, she also edits Marvel's Conan series (Conan the Barbarian, King Conan, The Savage Sword of Conan) and *Ka-Zar*. (Her husband, Walter Simonson, by the way, is doing pencil breakdowns for the X-Men/Teen Titans team-up.)

This interview was conducted in December, 1981 and was transcribed by Kim Thompson. It was edited and updated by Claremont, Jones, and myself in late

March and early April of 1982.

Since *The X-Men* is an ongoing series, this last interview will undoubtedly have dated a little by the time this volume finally appears. But no matter when you read it, this interview will provide an interesting look at the early stages of creating some major comics projects.

—P.S.

SANDERSON: How did the idea for a second X-Men series come about?

CLAREMONT: For about the last year since the spring of '81 Weezie [Louise Jones] and I have on various occasions kicked around the idea of doing a second book. Just in a bullshit sort of framework: "Gee, wouldn't it be nice to do a second book." "What would we do in it?" "Oh, probably go crazy and have heart seizures and nervous breakdowns and things like that." The main reason why nothing was ever done about it was that we concluded that putting out one book was giving us grief enough schedulewise and putting out a second book, especially considering the fact that there seemed to be no artistic personnel available..

JONES: At the time

CLAREMONT: We decided to wait until we found someone and then think seriously about putting it together.

JONES: We were afraid that we would go to them and say, "Hey, let's do an X-Men book," and they would



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Robin (lying down), Raven (left) and Wonder Girl (right) of the Teen Titans as drawn by Walt Simonson (*Marvel Super Special #24: X-Men/Teen Titans*)

say, "Yes but the only person available is somebody that we wouldn't be interested in using

CLAREMONT: And worse that they would schedule it three months prior to when we went in and talked to them about it

JONES: So we were going to keep our mouths shut until the spring. We were going to pick our people and then we were going to say, "Hey, we've got a book for you."

CLAREMONT: Right. With three issues in the drawer. And what happened was that while we were pretty much solidifying the concept or at least getting it as much into focus as we felt we needed, Mark Gruenwald went into Jim [Shooter]'s office with a proposal for an alternative *X-Men* book involving the "loose" members of the original team: Angel, Iceman, Beast, Havoc, Polaris—and I suppose any other extraneous mutants that happened to be around, and setting them up on the West Coast as a kind of a

JONES: X-Men West..

CLAREMONT: And regardless of the individual merits of the concept, it was way different from what we had in mind. Jim quite properly went to Weezy and said that this proposal had been made to him, and asked if we had any problems with it... or suggestions, or comments. Weezy pointed out, well, we had our own concept in the works, and we'd had it for quite some time. And Jim said, "Oh, okay, well, let's hear it." So then we had to put up or shut up.

JONES: So we told him and he said, "Okay."

CLAREMONT: And luckily at about the same time Bob McLeod had just surfaced.

JONES: ...as a real fine penciler

CLAREMONT: He'd bailed us out on #151 and #152, and was very interested in penciling *The*

X-Men, and the pieces all meshed together

JONES: Yeah. So we were able to get the people we wanted and the concept we wanted. It worked out well.

CLAREMONT: It's only taken us, what? Four months now?

SANDERSON: And what is the concept? How is this different from the regular book?

CLAREMONT: God only knows. One fundamental difference is, Len [Wein] and Dave [Cockrum] thought up the original book and I thought up this one.

JONES: Okay, the fundamental concept is that Professor Xavier runs a school, and that actually sort of goes back to Stan's original concept of the *X-Men*, in a way. Very young team members, only schoolkids really.

CLAREMONT: Basically, the book takes young teenagers—the age range we're going for is roughly 14, 15, 16, 17 tops.

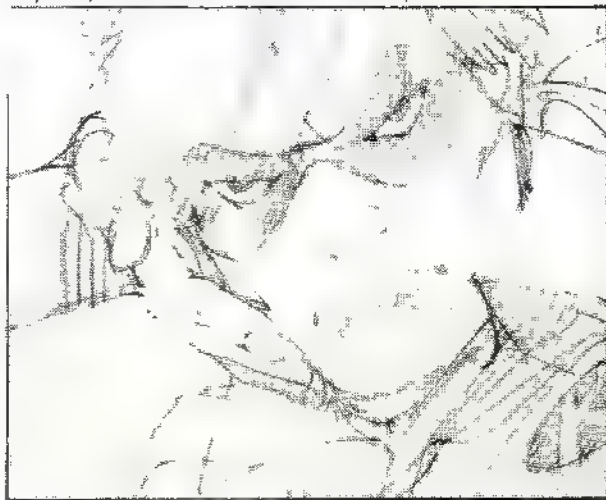
JONES: We may even have a 13-year old in there.

CLAREMONT: We could go down to 13. We've got a token adult, but primarily we want to keep early and middle teens.

JONES: Just at the age when kids' mutant powers are emerging.

CLAREMONT: Right. And thematically, the idea is, how do you cope with the fact that one morning you wake up and suddenly you can walk through walls? Or fly? Or turn into an animal? Or project beams of force? Or read other people's thoughts? Or do any of the other thousand and one things that a super-powered character can do? Or what if you wake up one morning

Robin in a grim mood (Simonson breakdowns for *Marvel Super Special #24: X-Men/Teen Titans*)



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and you've got a sixth finger? And you have no other problems, it's just that you mutated into something that isn't quite normal. What Xavier is doing in the school is gathering up young mutants and teaching them primarily how to cope with their powers. The fundamental role of saving the world, of combating "evil" mutants, is still going to be left to the A-Team.

JONES: The X-Men.

CLAREMONT: The original book .. the Uncanny book

JONES: Not the Baby X-Men.

CLAREMONT: Not the X-Babies.

SANDERSON: Does this mean that at this point there's no title for the book?

JONES: Well, we've kicked around some titles.

CLAREMONT: It looks like the most promising is the one that Stan originally wanted for *The X-Men* itself, which is *The Mutants*. But who knows? The title in that sense is the last thing we're going to deal with.

JONES: It's the least important.

CLAREMONT: We may not make up our mind until the time actually comes to lay out the cover and fill in the vouchers.

JONES: And then we'd better think of something!

CLAREMONT: And then we'll go to Jim [Shooter] who will consult his mother's master list, which has got just about 200,000 names ..

SANDERSON: Ah, she's the one who named Marauders, as I recall.

CLAREMONT: Yes. Actually, a number of the names on her list are very very good. Coming up with names is something I have a real hard time doing. So having someone who's got a whole list of them is more than useful. But the focus of the second book will be primarily on the characters of the kids and how they deal with this new situation.

JONES: Actually, if the name of the second book was up to Chris and me, we'd probably call it *The X-Babies*.

CLAREMONT: But that's just because we're perverse and have absolutely no sense of tact.

JONES: To say nothing of commercial sense, either.

CLAREMONT: And good taste.¹



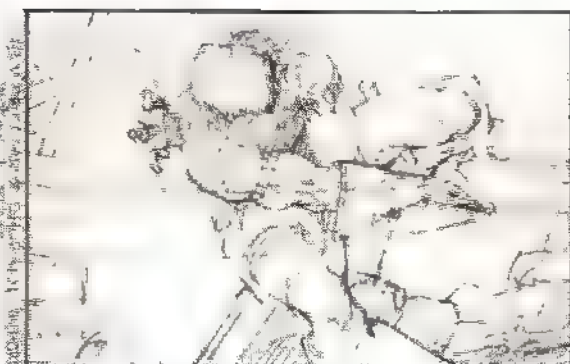
The saga of Dark Phoenix as told to the Teen Titans and envisioned by Walt Simonson (Marvel Super Special #24 X-Men/Teen Titans)

SANDERSON: So, does this mean you're going to try to stay away from the standard super-hero vs. super-villain plots in this book?

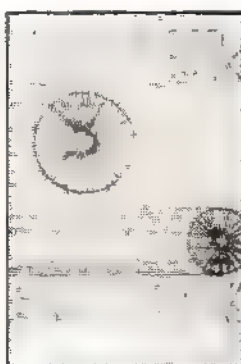
JONES: No [laughter] We're going to look at them in a different way; the focus will be totally different.

CLAREMONT: Again, this is all tentative in that the book will evolve as we go along, but I would like primarily to keep this focused in and around the mansion, Salem Center, that area of Westchester, New York City—the Northeast primarily, but not any farther than that. I would like to steer clear of the globetrotting, universetrotting, dimensiontrotting milieu of the X-Men themselves, because the idea is to draw as stark and absolute a contrast as possible. These are kids who could go down to the local malt shop, or would like to, which is something which, for better or worse, I can't imagine the X-Men doing. One of the more incongruous scenes I can remember is the one that John [Byrne] drew of Storm and Colossus and Wolverine in

¹ Since this interview, the new series has been christened *The New Mutants*. —P.S.



The Terminator, one of the Teen Titans' foes, takes on one of Darkseid's underlings (Simonson breakdowns for *Marvel Super Special* #24: *X-Men/Teen Titans*)



simply can't match her offer. And we'll see what happens from there. Kids could like one school or run away to the other, or vice versa.

SANDERSON: Well, it depends on what they want to do with their powers.

CLAREMONT: It depends a lot on how they're treated at the school, too. I don't foresee the kids at the Massachusetts academy being indoctrinated with the "You-will-serve-the-Hellfire-Club" sort of thing, but by the same token you could get a kid in

Xavier's school who would much rather go to the Massachusetts Academy or whatever. In that respect the possibilities and potentials are virtually unlimited.

SANDERSON: Does this mean that possibly you will have new members coming in throughout the run of the book?

CLAREMONT: Oh, sure. It's intended that way

your basic Illinois sodashop... [#129]

SANDERSON: Which immediately got wrecked

CLAREMONT: Which immediately got wrecked
The X-Babies won't go looking for trouble

JONES: And also they wouldn't be as adept at dealing with it as the X-Men would because they just don't have the practice. They're kids

CLAREMONT: Xavier would be a lot more reluctant to involve them in a major fight because they're kids

JONES: They might accidentally, of course, get involved in a major fight.

CLAREMONT: Of course

JONES: These things happen in comic books

CLAREMONT: But it would be very awkward if any of them got caught, killed, maimed, or ground into hamburger. Having to explain it to their parents might cause a lot of trouble. That's the other thing: these people will have parents. There will be the stresses and strains not merely of being super-powered but of being a teenager, of being 14

SANDERSON: Will these parents know what their children are learning to do?

CLAREMONT: They'll know that their children are at a special school.

JONES: Some of them know that their children have special powers. There may be some that don't.

CLAREMONT: It depends

JONES: One of the kids' parents knows for sure.

CLAREMONT: We'll make it up as we go along, in a sense, deal with each case individually.

SANDERSON: Now, in the original X-Men issues, Xavier was going around trying to recruit new mutants for the team and in doing so, competing with a rival group that was recruiting members. Magneto's Brotherhood. Will you be doing stories similar to this, looking for new mutants, and perhaps competing with, not Magneto, I suppose this time, but Miss Frost's preppie school for super-villains? [#151-2]

CLAREMONT: Oh, of course. She has more resources, and I can foresee situations in which Xavier



Darkseid, evil master of the planet Apokolips (Simonson breakdowns for *Marvel Super Special* #24: *X-Men/Teen Titans*.)

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There will be a very small core team, three, four characters, who will remain at least for the foreseeable future, and then around them we'll have characters come and go — some kids flunk out, some kids' powers go away, some become heroes, some become villains, some decide not to become anything at all

JONES: Some can't take it.

CLAREMONT: Some can't take it. Some live, some die

SANDERSON: And some even graduate to the A book?

JONES AND CLAREMONT: We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. [laughter]

JONES: They're not old enough to even think about it yet, if you figure Marvel time. The oldest one is maybe well, Kitty's young, but she's different. She's got an old brain

CLAREMONT: And also, it depends whether there's an opening in the A-Book

JONES: Maybe we'll kill somebody.

CLAREMONT: Yeah

JONES: [laughter]

CLAREMONT: Who knows? Practice makes perfect

SANDERSON: What's the rationale for Kitty staying with the A-Team?

JONES: You think after going with the A-Team she would—

CLAREMONT: Having saved the world as often as she has, first of all—

JONES: I mean really, just suggest it—

CLAREMONT: Who's going to make her do it? I mean, really.

JONES: Really

CLAREMONT: What are you going to do—drag her kicking and screaming over to the other side of the house? How do you hold on to her? She's intangible.

JONES: No way. She would not go to school with those babies. Forget it!

SANDERSON: I suppose some of the babies, especially those slightly older than she, might be jealous of her

CLAREMONT: Of course.

JONES: Sure

CLAREMONT: That gives us a conflict

JONES: Yes. We like conflict.

SANDERSON: So... who are the new members going to be?

CLAREMONT: Oh, beats me



One of the Fre-P ts of Apokolips as seen in the X-Men/Teen Titans team-up (Simonson breakdowns)

SANDERSON [to Jones]: He's no help.

JONES: I know. We don't really know and we probably shouldn't say their names out loud anyway

CLAREMONT: Well, there is one definite member and that's Karma²

JONES: Yes. We can say her name out loud

CLAREMONT: From *Marvel Team Up* #100. She's the token adult. She'll be the team leader, basically

SANDERSON: Roughly how old is she?

CLAREMONT: She's about 20

JONES: Chris thinks she'll be the team leader and I think she won't be the team leader. Chris will probably win [laughter]

CLAREMONT: We'll cross that bridge when we come to it

Karma's principal function in a non-superheroic

² Her real name is Xi'an Coy Manh.



A historic encounter: Marvel's X-Men meet DC's Teen Titans in *Marvel Super Special* #24 (pencil breakdowns by Walt Simonson)

capacity is that with the burgeoning number of characters running around the mansion somebody's got to keep track of the bills and run the place, and Moira can't do it because even though we presented her as a housekeeper originally, she's not. She's a world renowned geneticist and Banshee's getting lonely back in Ireland. So we need a character essentially to take care of things, and Karma fits the bill in too many different ways.

SANDERSON: For those of our readers who didn't read *Marvel Team Up* #100, what are her background and powers?

CLAREMONT: She possesses people. She has the

power to take over another person's body, to utilize their abilities...

SANDERSON: And is Vietnamese continuing the idea of having mutants from all over the world?

JONES: Yes, we plan on continuing the international theme.

CLAREMONT: No question about it. There's a young girl, about 15, an American Indian, probably Cheyenne, whose tentative name is Psyche³. She's a telepath who, because of her lack of training, relates more easily to animals than people, which is a faculty I think we'll probably stay with. She projects dreams. The relationship between her and Xavier

her and everybody—at least at the beginning is somewhat antagonistic. She's in the team because she has no choice. It was the last wish of her dying grandfather. He wasn't dying when he told her to do it, but—

SANDERSON: Her dying grandfather knew about the X-Men?

CLAREMONT: No. The dying grandfather knew about Xavier. His son and Xavier were blood brothers, you see. They served together in Korea.

We have a young, basically black but probably mixed blood kid from Rio, whose old man is very rich. His name is Sunspot⁴, and he has the power to absorb solar energy and manifest it as strength. He's considerably strong, potentially in Colossus's league and possibly bigger.

JONES: But at this point, as the book opens, he's still small. And he's also a soccer player.

CLAREMONT: The initial transformation into his power mode is somewhat spectacular and quite unnerving. Then we have a gangly kid from Appalachia, Sam Guthrie, who has the ability to trigger controlled thermo-chemical reactions, which propel him through the air with the force and speed of a cannonball—which is his name.

The last member of this core group is a young girl from Scotland who is a shape changer. She changes into a wolf and comes as she does from a very fun-

³ Psyche's real name is Danielle Moonstar

⁴ Sunspot's real name is Roberto DaCosta



Kitty gets up on the wrong side of bed (Marvel Super Special #24 X-Men/Teen Titans; Claremont-Simonson-Austin).

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damentalist society, her mutant ability is viewed by the people in her village as a sign of demonic possession, so when we first see her they're trying to exorcize her power. Her basic problem is that she views her abilities not as natural but as things demonic and evil.⁵

SANDERSON: So she herself subscribes to this fundamentalist Christian religion.

CLAREMONT: Yes.

SANDERSON: And I assume this is going to create all sorts of conflicts considering the kind of people that are living in the X-Men mansion.

CLAREMONT: I certainly hope so.

SANDERSON: Are you at all uneasy about having to bring this fundamentalist girl in contact with all these people with very different beliefs and lifestyles in that you might have some readers who might feel that you're showing disrespect for her religion if she changes her beliefs in any way?

JONES: Nah. We expect to treat everybody's religion with the same respect we treat the ones we've already established.

SANDERSON: So these people will be the core group.

CLAREMONT: So far. Again, things may change. There are lots of characters on tap. We've got Jean's sister's children to think of.

JONES: We're sure that they'll be showing up.

CLAREMONT: Sooner or later.

SANDERSON: Have they got names yet?

JONES: You'll have to ask Jean's sister [laughter]. We don't know!

CLAREMONT: Write her a letter.

SANDERSON: A boy and a girl, or two boys, or what?

CLAREMONT: We're not sure yet.

JONES: We think maybe they're twins, but we're not sure.

CLAREMONT: Maybe a girl and a boy.

SANDERSON: Sara [Jean Grey's sister], of course, knows about the X-Men and wouldn't be happy about this.

CLAREMONT: She knows about the X-Men and she knows that the kids may be mutants.

SANDERSON: And she knows that her sister got killed.

CLAREMONT: Yes. That's going to create a few tensions. That's the idea. The more the merrier.

JONES: You bet.

SANDERSON: These two kids would possibly be telekinetics and telepaths.

JONES: Who knows? We haven't asked them! [laughter]

CLAREMONT: Tentatively we're dealing with one as a projecting and one as a receiving empath.

SANDERSON: And they work as a team.

JONES: That's what we're thinking of.

SANDERSON: And you're not thinking of Baby Phoenixes in the making?

CLAREMONT: One's enough. Phoenix is something that can be dealt with only in the original.

⁵ This girl's name is Rahne Sinclair, as yet she does not have a name for her sub-hero identity.

Originally, this shape-changing girl was to be a fundamentalist Moslem from Iran. However, there was already a darkhaired female in the current Psyche — and rather than remove or change her, it was decided to change the shape-shifter's nationality and appearance.



Kitty reacts to getting up on the wrong side of bed (Marvel Super Special #24: X-Men/Teen Titans Claremont-Simonson Austin)

JONES: Hear, hear.

CLAREMONT: So that when we bring her back oops!

SANDERSON: [to the tape recorder] You didn't hear that

CLAREMONT: Well, just dropping little hints

SANDERSON: Will the new members wear the original X-Men outfits, or will they have individualized costumes?

JONES: Ummm... Xavier's probably going to try to make them wear the X-Men outfits, but they're teenagers

CLAREMONT: I know there's one character who will probably refuse right away, and that's Psyche, the Indian girl. As far as the others, it depends on how they look in 'em.

JONES: Whether they like them

SANDERSON: It might get in the way when the Scots girl turns into a wolf.

CLAREMONT: This is true. Of course, it never stopped Colossus. Then again, there's some question as to whether they need costumes at all if all their superhero work is done at the school. But these are questions we will ask as we go along.

JONES: Who knows? The costumes may be like gym outfits for them. And everybody knows that all kids love their gym outfits.

CLAREMONT: They're so well designed and so attractive.

JONES: Really

SANDERSON: How much interaction is there going to be between the two groups? Will there be regular

cross over stories?

JONES: Irregular, maybe. And they're not going to continually pop up at all.

CLAREMONT: In the contextual sense, yes, because they inhabit the same fundamental space. But the kids live in one wing and the grad school is in the other wing and the main house is in between.

JONES: We're not going to do the same book twice.

CLAREMONT: Occasionally people might run into the wrong Danger Room at the right moment or something. Occasionally you might have a case [in the new book] where special circumstances require special talents that the A-Team might have.

SANDERSON: Magneto, the Hellfire Club, and the Juggernaut have all broken into the mansion at one point or another. If there was a storyline like that, it would have to involve all of them, I'd expect.

CLAREMONT: Women and children first. The men'll hide. Actually one of the things we're toying with is having Magneto sign on as a teacher.

JONES: We were toying with that.

SANDERSON: Because at present he may have reformed, more or less. [#150]

JONES: God knows, he tries.

CLAREMONT: No comment. About the Reformation, anyway... Martin Luther had great hopes for it when it began.

The one thing we want to definitely avoid is this becoming a sort of Legion of Substitute X-Men. Or becoming a companion book in the sense of Spectacular Spider-Man. Or Action, complementing Superman. We want something that stands on its own as a



Wolverine, Colossus, and Nightcrawler in the Danger Room, as rendered by Simonson. (Marvel Super Special #24 X-Men/Teen Titans: Claremont-Simonson-Austin)

book. It keeps the guts, the heart and the soul of the X-Men concept, but it goes its own way in doing it.

SANDERSON: Was there any thought to bringing Stryn into the team?

CLAREMONT: Yeah. Another possibility.

JONES: She may be a little old. But who knows?

SANDERSON: Is either one of you afraid that there might be an opinion in fandom that Marvel's exploiting the X-Men? Do you worry about overexposing the concept?

JONES: No, actually we're not, because we're doing a whole different book.

CLAREMONT: That's why we're trying so hard to make it so different, is that we don't want this to be an exploitation book.

JONES: The X-Men have actually evolved from a time when they were more or less what we're doing now [in the new series, into [today, when they are] a grown up team—a super-hero team. They pretty much know how to use their powers.

CLAREMONT: This is basically the book Jim [Shooter] always felt *The X-Men* should be.

JONES: Yes. Xavier as teacher.

CLAREMONT: It finally restores to Xavier a necessity of function that he hasn't had in *The Uncanny X-Men*.

since after the first year of the new team's existence.

JONES: Besides, nobody in the new team would dare to call him "Charlie."

CLAREMONT: Oh, definitely.

JONES: They call him "Sir."

CLAREMONT: 'Boss.'

JONES: "Master."

CLAREMONT: Except for Moira; she'd call him "Charlie."

SANDERSON: Is she going to be a regular?

CLAREMONT: Yes. Hopefully, the second book will allow us to better utilize a number of supporting characters who are more noticeable in *The X-Men* by their absence, such as Moira.

JONES: The thing is, she's actually useful; she performs a function for this group, because she tests mutants. And that's going to be real necessary.

CLAREMONT: Karl Lykos gets reformed in *Marvel Fanfare* #4. Once he's cured, he'll come into the series as the in-house physician.

JONES: The old family doctor.

CLAREMONT: Stevie Hunter [will be in it]. They go to dance class at Stevie's place.

JONES: I think the little Brazilian kid is going to love dance class. The kid's favorite. He's Mr. Macho.



Frank Miller's rendition of Wolverine (*Wolverine* #1; Claremont-Miller-Rubinstein).

CLAREMONT: Karma and her brother and sister are going to be renting the top half of Stevie's house so there'll hopefully be lots of possibilities for interaction. See, one of the problems that has arisen with *The X-Men* is that it is a very insular book; there is a very limited interaction between the X-Men and normal

people, the world around them. They generally tend to interact on a very extraordinary and extreme plane of reality, with super-heroes or aliens or demons or God knows what else. It's a very rarefied atmosphere, whereas with this one, we want to go more in the direction of interaction between super-beings and normal people.

SANDERSON: Which is actually a characteristic of Thomas's early issues, to a large extent.

CLAREMONT: Yeah.

SANDERSON: When do you hope the new series will start?

CLAREMONT: Well, if you want to be absolutely literal, it started sometime last September.

JONES: You mean on sale.

CLAREMONT: Oh, you mean on sale. Hah!

JONES: The introductory graphic novel—*The New Mutants*—is due in September, with the series premiering about six weeks later.

SANDERSON: Okay. Now, speaking of other projects, what about the *X-Men/Teen Titans* book [*Marvel Super Special* #24]?

CLAREMONT: It's plotted.

SANDERSON: When is this supposed to be released, and who is drawing and inking it?

JONES: Walt Simonson and Terry Austin.

CLAREMONT: And Tom Orzechowski will do the lettering.

JONES: Glynis [Wein] will probably color it. It'll be in *Star-Lord* format. Good paper. Glitzy color.

CLAREMONT: Theoretically I think we're aiming toward having the book inked and ready to go by May. It's supposed to be on sale this July.

SANDERSON: Originally this was announced as an *X-Men/Legion* book. What happened to change it?

CLAREMONT: You'd have to check with DC for confirmation, but as I understand it, the argument was made that *Titans* was selling like a bastard and the *Legion* wasn't and why should DC plug a poor-to-middling selling book when they can plug their top book, which is what the *Titans* is turning into. And you can't argue with that, really.

SANDERSON: Now there have been accusations that the *New Teen Titans* are somewhat like the *New X-Men*. Now that you two have been working on this book do you find this to be true or do you find that there are specific differences?

CLAREMONT: There are certain undeniable similarities. We have noticed that the *Teen Titans* most of the time have two arms, two legs, a head, a torso.

JONES: And they're fairly young, generally speaking, but not as young as the *X-Babies*.

CLAREMONT: Some of them are male, some of them are female.

SANDERSON: *What a surprise*

CLAREMONT: Well, Changeling is indeterminate, but you never know

JONES: And some of them have super powers. How about that?

CLAREMONT: What it comes down to is that George Perez and Dave Cockrum like drawing women with thick manes of hair, and Little Orphan Annie eyes...

JONES: But Cockrum isn't going to be doing the Baby Book. And McLeod doesn't really draw like that. So I expect the visuals will be pretty different.

CLAREMONT: But as far as characterization [the X-Men and Titans are] not really, [alike]. One of the things I discovered when plotting the X-Titans was that if there are similarities, they are superficial physical similarities, and once you go beyond that, the differences are really quite dramatic. I find the X-Men much richer and more three-dimensional and more easily identifiable than the Teen Titans. But I also think Marv would probably find the Teen Titans far richer and more three dimensional and enjoyable than the X-Men. This is because I know who the X-Men are and he knows who the Titans are. All I have to go on as far as the Titans are concerned are the stories that have seen print, and Marv has the 70-odd issues of X-Men that have seen print, which means in a real sense each of us knows pretty much the same as the average reader [about the other person's characters], which is quite a lot but nowhere near that amount known by the person who created the characters.

SANDERSON: *Is Wolfman advising you on the book in any way?*

CLAREMONT: Marv has said that if I need advice on characterization, if I have any questions, if I need anything clarified, he would be more than happy to tell me, as I would tell him, if our positions were reversed.

JONES: And of course DC has approval on the plot so they'll make sure we get their characters right.

SANDERSON: *How does it work editorially? Are you and Wein co-editing the book?*

JONES: No, I'm editing it.

CLAREMONT: I think there is a clause in the contract that forbids in big letters "any official contact" for the purposes of collaborating.

JONES: Which is just kind of weird. I don't know where it came from or why it's there.

SANDERSON: *Now you're trying to keep very tight security on this project.*

JONES: You bet.

SANDERSON: *But it has been revealed that the villains are going to be Darkseid and Dark Phoenix.*

JONES: And the Terminator.

SANDERSON: *Now why did you decide to pick Darkseid? What is it that you like about him?*



Wolverine in Japan (Wolverine #1, Claremont Miller Rubenstein)

CLAREMONT: Weezy and I were sitting here kicking the idea around.

JONES: We said, "Who does DC have?"

CLAREMONT: "...that's worth fighting."

JONES: And we said, "Who was the biggest villain the

MARIKO YASHIDA.



DAUGHTER OF ONE OF THE NOBLEST, RICHEST, MOST POWERFUL FAMILIES IN JAPAN, SHE CAN TRACE HER LINEAGE BACK ALMOST 2,000 YEARS. ME, I KNOW MY FATHER -- THAT'S AS FAR AS IT GOES.

Wolverine's lady love,
Mariko (Wolverine #1-
Claremont-Miller
Rubinstein)

FROM THE MOMENT WE
MET, I LOVED HER.
AN' SHE LOVED ME.

AIN'T LIFE A CROCK?

X-Men had at that point?" The meanest mother in the valley and that was obviously Dark Phoenix. Dark Phoenix and Darkseid, doesn't that sound great? And Walter [Simonson] walked in and said, "Darkseid! If you're going to have Darkseid I want to draw it" And we said, "Okay."

CLAREMONT: Hey, no fool me

JONES: So we had to see if Len and company would allow us to do it, and they did. But we have to use Ter-

minator too, because he's a Titans villain (while Darkseid is not).

CLAREMONT: [There was a problem choosing the major DC villain for the X-Titans book.] It's the same problem the X-Men would have had as of X-Men #17, if you walked in and said, "Okay, we're going to have a great cross-company team-up, your biggest villain with their biggest villain." After 17 issues, what have you got?

SANDERSON: Well, the X-Men already had Magneto.

CLAREMONT: True. But the thing is, even then, Magneto was working with the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, and the problem we ran into was, most of the menaces Marv has invented for the Titans were groups, just as most of the menaces I've invented for the X-Men were groups. Mostly because you want to have groups fighting groups, because otherwise, if you have a single villain fighting a group, the reader's sympathy tends to go to the villain because he's outnumbered and hence becomes kind of an underdog.

JONES: When you've got seven characters on each team—

CLAREMONT: —plus seven villains, plus supporting characters, plus extraneous innocent bystanders—

JONES: —it gets real crowded, so we [decided to use] one villain apiece [from each company for the X-Titans book. The Terminator was added later].

CLAREMONT: Artists don't like drawing lots of people, writers don't like writing lots of people, and letterers, God.

JONES: Also, you don't have that many panels.

CLAREMONT: There is an upper limit. I was interested in doing a 96-page book but every time I mentioned it I kept hearing yowls of protest. And one of the disadvantages of doing any sort of group book is the time it takes to introduce everybody, heroes and villains, and the more people you have to introduce, the less pages you have to resolve the story.

SANDERSON: As a result, I take it, then, we're not going to be seeing Mister Miracle or any of the other members of the New Gods mythos.

JONES: No.

CLAREMONT: Oh, boy, we wanted to.

JONES: Well, we did want to, but we're not going to. Except for Metron. Should we even be saying that? Or well, we can always cut it out. We don't want them to know.

CLAREMONT: I wanted to bring in all of the Mister Miracle crew: Virman Vunderbar...

SANDERSON: Granny Goodness...

CLAREMONT: Well, not so much Granny Goodness, but Doctor Bedlam and Kanto the assassin. Funky Fla—

SANDERSON: *DeSaad*

CLAREMONT: No, DeSaad's dead. DeSaad was Omega beamed.

JONES: Is DeSaad back again?

CLAREMONT: He was brought back in *Return of the New Gods*, but I was just using the Kirby stuff for my primary source material.

JONES: Besides, you can't come back from being Omega beamed.

CLAREMONT: This is true. Rather, you can come back from being Omega-beamed, but you can't come back from total wipe out, which happened to DeSaad.

JONES: Oh, it sure did.

CLAREMONT: But again, we ran into the problem that the more people you bring in, the more people you have to establish and we were going to have enough trouble establishing Darkseid. If we had to establish the entire goddamned New Gods mythos

JONES: And Chris kept coming up with wonderful, really good stuff and concepts, and I kept saying "No!" It was cruel, but he really doesn't have enough room for it all.

CLAREMONT: We had two incredible marathon plotting sessions at Weezie's apartment for dinner. The first had Walt, Terry, Weezie and me, and the second had Weezie, Walt, and me, and I think all told we most have spent something like 20 hours just hammering this thing out. And I think it's worth it. I think it's a hell of a good plot.

SANDERSON: So unlike the first two or three books there will be no cameos by other Marvel or DC characters.

CLAREMONT: Well, if we can get away with it, there will be a cameo by every Marvel and DC hero.

JONES: Everyone that ever existed ever.

CLAREMONT: Just about, yeah.

JONES: But we think that maybe we aren't going to be able to draw that many people.

SANDERSON: So no Dark Phoenix blasting Superman to the next galaxy.

JONES: Oh, heavens, no.

CLAREMONT: No.

JONES: Any appearances will be token at best.

CLAREMONT: Like TV monitors showing scenes from natural disasters.

JONES: We do have, actually, good reasons for bring-

LOST SOULS!



New regular X-Men penciller Paul Smith first encounters the Angel who meets Ka-Zar and Zabú, in *Marvel Fanfare* #4 [Claremont Smith-Austin]

ing in lots of other super villains, and it's all worked into the plot, but we don't know if DC is going to let us do that or not, or if we'll have the room.

CLAREMONT: We can tell you the "1812 Overture" is an integral part of the story.

JONES: Yes, it is.

SANDERSON: [bewildered by the last remark but valiantly pressing onward] Will the Dark Phoenix that appears in that story be Jean Grey, or would that be telling?

CLAREMONT: That would be telling.

SANDERSON: Would you feel that if Jean Grey did return as Dark Phoenix, that that would, as one person has said, make useless her sacrifice in #137?



Paul Smith's Storm and Nightcrawler [Marvel Fanfare #4 Claremont-Smith-Aust n]

JONES: I think that would be telling, too

CLAREMONT: It would, but by the same token, the story is structured in such a way as to render any in my mind, anyway, and everyone knows I'm a warped, totally reprehensible and unscrupulous character

SANDERSON: [to tape recorder] You heard it here first

CLAREMONT: In my mind the story is structured in such a way so as to render any such objections moot

SANDERSON: Is it possible that one reason for this is the fact that this story does not take place in continuity anyway?

CLAREMONT: No

JONES: No. It might as well be real. We're playing by real universe rules. This is not a "What If."

CLAREMONT: We operated on the assumption - subconscious, I would think, in many cases, but it was there, nonetheless - that this story could be slotted into either the *Titans* continuity or the *X-Men* continuity with no changes whatsoever. It's a real story. Just to cite an example, in one establishing scene we have Cyborg going across midtown Manhattan, passing what's left of the IBM building, and thinking about

"Gee, its recent destruction at the hands of ..."

SANDERSON: What I meant was, many readers have protested that the DC and Marvel team ups could not possibly happen in mainstream DC or Marvel continuity because of all the logical contradictions that would arise

CLAREMONT: Well, in the broad omniversal sense, we cannot resolve those inherent contradictions, such as how come everybody doesn't know everyone, and whatever. As far as the specific reality of the 64 pages of the story goes, we are trying to maintain an internally consistent logic and we think that given the existence of this combined world [where DC and Marvel characters co-exist], the book could be slotted in [the continuity]. If you could accept Marvel characters in the DC universe or DC characters in the Marvel universe, the story could be printed in either the *Teen Titans* or *The X-Men* without any substantial changes and without violating the continuity of either series

SANDERSON: Might this story have repercussions on the regular team continuity afterward?

JONES: Probably not. Who knows?

CLAREMONT: Ask us in eight months

SANDERSON: Next, there is going to be a Wolverine mini-series. Are you [Jones] editing that as well?

JONES: Mm hm

SANDERSON: What's the basic premise?

CLAREMONT: It's me and Frank Miller and Josef Rubinstein and we're going to make lots of money

JONES: Big bucks.

SANDERSON: In four parts

CLAREMONT: Four parts, yes

SANDERSON: And what's the basic premise of this, or is this also top secret?

CLAREMONT: Basically, it's Wolverine. There are no other X-Men in it. It is focused completely on Wolverine

JONES: It's a journey in search of self.

CLAREMONT: That's basically it. We're going to illuminate his character, [but] not his past. No flashbacks. You won't learn where he came from, but you'll learn who he is and what he is. And.

SANDERSON: Can you expand on that at all?

* From the battle between Deathbird and the X-Men in #155. P. 5

CLAREMONT: It's a love story.

SANDERSON: Involving Mariko?

CLAREMONT: Well, she's in it

SANDERSON: Involving the Hudsons?

CLAREMONT: No. Not involving any of the mainstream continuity at all

JONES: No, in fact, Manko would be the only character in the X-Men book beside Wolverine who's in it.

CLAREMONT: We're setting it in Japan and a lot of what the story is comes out of the setting and the context. And to go any further into that would be to tell too much.

SANDERSON: Now, are you going to work differently writing this particular series than you would with Byrne or Cockrum? I've heard Miller say at the last Creation Con that he felt captions and thought balloons were soon going to become things

of the past, that he prefers to work in different ways. Would this mean that you would try to cater to his strengths by writing in a different fashion than usual?

CLAREMONT: It's hard to say, because what I write would depend far more than most [writers] on the art. Over the summer Frank and I got together and talked a lot over what we wanted to do, and where we wanted to go. We hammered out a rough outline. We both know where we want to go and I'm sure that as we go along I will call him, he will call me, and we'll evolve it. I think it is a much tighter collaboration than I usually do because the story comes out of both of us as opposed to me saying, "Let's do this," or him saying "Let's do this" and going straight through following my unique vision or his. It's a synthesis, which to me is the ideal way of doing comics, just the two of us sitting down and butting heads, and seeing what we can come up with. Frank is being very careful not to impose himself as a writer on me. I asked him, actually, if he wanted to contribute in a writing sense, if he wanted to sit down and go over the script and kick it around, and he felt that would be a mistake in this case, because ..

JONES: Because you're the writer.

CLAREMONT: Yes. And Frank views himself as the artist in this case. So what he's doing is contributing his awesome storytelling skills.

JONES: Which, God knows, are awesome.

CLAREMONT: And for my part I wouldn't mind not having to write captions and thought balloons, because I'm quintessentially lazy anyway. But as to how the story will look when it's finished, I wouldn't mind going for something completely different, nor would Frank, I'm sure. But it's the kind of thing that's impossible to say until it's actually there in front of you, and you sit down and have to say, okay, here's where we



Paul Smith's Colossus in action [Marvel Fanfare #4: Claremont-Smith-Austin]

begin, here's where we end, and here's what we have to say in the middle

SANDERSON: Whatever happened to the graphic novel?

JONES: Which graphic novel? You mean the Neal Adams graphic novel?

SANDERSON: Yes.

CLAREMONT: Honestly, I don't know what happened to it officially. I know that Jim [Shooter] sent the contract to Neal, I know that Neal had certain questions and reservations, and has evidently sent back suggestions for revisions, and I suppose someday before I die I'll hear whether it's been accepted or not. In the interim we are negotiating with Brent Anderson to do a graphic novel with the X-Men..

SANDERSON: What do you think of the reports that Nelvana is making a live action movie about the X-Men?

CLAREMONT: Well, I had meetings with Michael Hirsh, who is their representative. As I understand it, Marvel and Nelvana are in final negotiations.⁷ We talked generally about what they wanted, they're interested in me working on it in some capacity or other, and the reason I'm being nebulous is, I don't want to fuck it up.

JONES: The thing with movie projects is, until they're totally completed, you never assume they're going to be. Never take it for granted.

CLAREMONT: It's finished when you actually pay five bucks to see it in the theatre. For example, there were certain givens. We both concluded that the two

⁷ In April, 1982, Nelvana and Marvel finally reached agreement to do the live action X-Men movie P S



Wolverine, Colossus, Ka-Zar, and Sabu have a workout in the Savage Land [Marvel Fanfare #4: Claremont-Smith-Austin].

characters who would be most difficult to pull off in terms of live-action would be Colossus and Angel. We talked about what characters we'd like to see in the movie, what villains might be feasible...

SANDERSON: Shooter said at a Creation Convention that he thought Nelvana wanted to do the Dark Phoenix storyline as a movie.

CLAREMONT: That was their initial thought, but they were viewing this as more than a single picture project, and they felt "Dark Phoenix" would be too downbeat a story for the initial film. So what they want to do is X-Men—the Movie, which I'm sure will make Jim very happy.

SANDERSON: And probably a completely original storyline.

CLAREMONT: That's one of the things that has to be worked out, that we're talking about.

SANDERSON: What do you think of Nelvana's work in the past, which has been in animation?

CLAREMONT: Ferociously impressed. It's been some of my favorite stuff in recent years. My admiration is considerable.

SANDERSON: Okay. Now, what kind of plans do you have for the regular A-Book?

CLAREMONT: GETTING IT ON SCHEDULE! Oops!

JONES: Dream on! That'll never happen.

SANDERSON: Will there perhaps be more experimental issues like "Kitty's Fairy Tale"? [153]

CLAREMONT: Well, we've got the X-Men meet Dracula [159].

JONES: That's sort of experimental. We don't know they're experimental until we do them and then people say, "That was an experimental issue," and we say, "Oh gosh, okay." So maybe.

CLAREMONT: We've got a storyline in the works in the planning stages that hopefully will be quite impressive when it's pulled off. But you're right, there are certain things that sound really great in conception and turn out to be duds, or that

seem really silly in conception and turn out to be award-winning stories. These are just things you can't predict in advance.

SANDERSON: Are there any hints you can give us about what will happen after the Starjammers serial and the Dracula story? The Annual involves Dracula as well.

CLAREMONT: Yeah, the Annual is the sequel to the Dracula story. It tentatively involves Rachel Van Helsing and the long-forgotten Montesi formula.⁹ Dave and I have in the works a six-part outer space saga involving the sleazoids we've been introducing in the past few issues, and the [Shi'ar] Empire, and thrills and chills and threats and powers beyond imagination.¹⁰

SANDERSON: Sounds like The X-Men is turning into an out-and-out space opera book.

CLAREMONT: Well, for a while, sure.

JONES: For one thing, it gets the X-Men off Earth so we can concentrate on the baby book on Earth.

CLAREMONT: The first issue is going to be a graphic novel. It won't guest star the original team. Which means it'll have to stand and fall on its own.

⁹ Among Nelvana's animation work here have been the television specials A Cosmic Christmas and The Devil and Daniel Mouse, and a forthcoming animated film, tentatively entitled Rock and Rule. —P.S.

¹⁰ The 1982 Annual, like X-Men #153, will be drawn by Bill Sienkiewicz. —P.S.

¹¹ However, Cockrum will not finish this serial. With either issue 163 or 164 he will leave The X-Men to begin work writing and drawing a Marvel graphic novel featuring his own creations, The Mysterians.

Taking over as regular X-Men penciller with issue 165 will be Marvel newcomer Paul Smith, whose work has already appeared in Marvel Fanfare and Iron Man, and will be appearing in Doctor Strange. Smith's first X-Men work did not appear in the mutants' own book, but in their team-up with Ka-Zar (written by Claremont) in Marvel Fanfare #4.

Previously, Smith's career has been in the field of animation: he worked on storyboards, layout, and character design at Filmation, was an assistant animator at Hanna-Barbera, and was an animator on the two Ralph Bakshi films, Lord of the Rings and American Pop. ►

JONES: And imagine how the regular team is going to feel when they get back.

CLAREMONT: "Who's this sleeping in my bed?"

JONES: Really. They won't even know about it when they leave.

CLAREMONT: Of course, they'll be real surprised anyway when they get back anyway and discover there's a mansion.

JONES: That's true.

CLAREMONT: "But wasn't this a wreck when we left?" [#154] That's assuming, of course, that they get back.

JONES: Of course.

SANDERSON: Of course.

CLAREMONT: Well, things are going to happen.

SANDERSON: What were your first reactions to the X-Men when you became editor of the series?

JONES: I loved them. I absolutely loved them. And I like them better now than I did before.

SANDERSON: Why is that?

JONES: They're nice interesting characters, and they interact well.

SANDERSON: I asked because you have not really been connected with traditional super-hero books in your career. You've done horror books, barbarian books, space operas. Even things like *The Micronauts* and *Dazzler* have not been traditional super-heroes. Now this is the only traditional super-hero book you've ever done.

CLAREMONT: Oh, it's not traditional...

SANDERSON: Well, as created originally by Lee and Kirby. So the question is, why is this the one that most appeals to you, and why is this the one that you like editing and are continuing to edit?

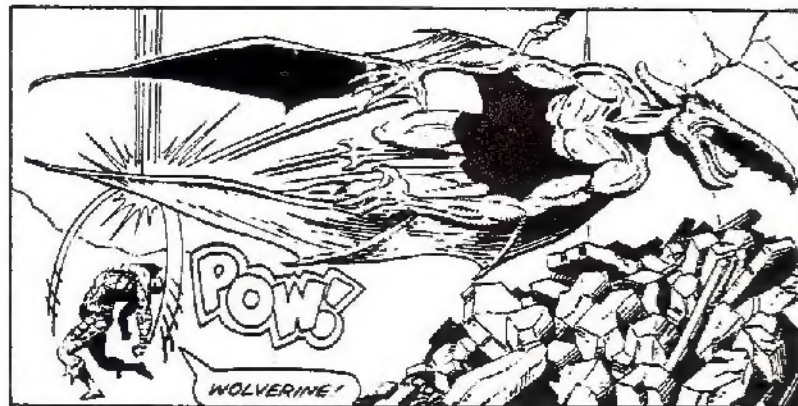
JONES: Okay, I love working with Chris. Chris is one of the pleasantest people I have ever worked with aside from being extremely talented. [Clare-

mont makes gestures of mock embarrassment.] He's terrific. The artists, by and large, have been pretty terrific. The characters are in-teresting, the way they interact is interesting, the way that you can move them around and...

CLAREMONT: You never know what's going to happen next.

JONES: We never know what's going to happen next. The characters almost write the books themselves. They do it for us. We're that involved with it. I guess that's why. They're neat-o.

Paul Smith brings out Wolverine's savagery [*Marvel Fanfare* #4: Claremont-Smith-Austin].



Smith says that "it's very flattering to come in off the street" and be given the job of drawing one of comics' top-selling series, and that he also feels "scared" as if he'd been "thrown into the deep end of the pool." But, he adds, "I have no intention of drowning." Naming several of the series' previous pencillers, Smith remarks that he has "a lot to live up to" but "that's what's challenging" about his new assignment.

Smith considered the offer to draw *The X-Men* for two days before deciding to accept it. One of his reasons for taking it was simply that, Smith says, he came to New York "to be a famous comic book artist" and after being offered *The X-Men*, "How could I turn it down?"

Also, Smith says, *The X-Men* gives him "a real chance of doing characterization," which is his principal interest. Louise Jones adds that Smith was offered *The X-Men* specifically because of his skill in this area.

— P. S.

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